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JUNE BY MRS. FORRESTER.

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J U N E.

BY

MRS. FORRESTER,

AUTHOR OF

“RHONA,” “MY LORD AND MY LADY,” ETC. ETC.

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I N T W O V O L U M E S.

VOL. II.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

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J U N E.

CHAPTER I.

THE months rolled on, and Sir Thomas and Lady Nevil were as happy as united lovers in a story-book. Perhaps there were moments when June, like other imaginative women, felt a regret for the romance that was lost in the reality of happiness and possession; but she had no cause to complain that Tom's devotion had diminished, though, like all men secure of a woman, he had grown less demonstrative than formerly. Indeed, he had quite forgotten that there was a time when he trembled between hope and fear—when it was uncertain whether his life should, as far as June was concerned, be blessed or cursed, when he hung upon her smile and trembled at her frown. June is quite a great lady now, and by no means indifferent to the fact that she is so, although she bears her honours in the most modest and unassuming way. Agnes had gone with a friend to

Italy for the winter, extremely thankful to escape from sight of the happiness which was gall and wormwood to her.

Madge was delighted at her sister's departure, and, truth to tell, there was a general, if unacknowledged, feeling of ease and freedom at the Rectory now that the saint-like Agnes had departed. There was something burdensome about her extreme goodness and sweetness; she made other people feel an unpleasant sense of their shortcomings.

Now the great secret of a charming woman is that she makes people feel pleased and satisfied with themselves, and stimulates in them the desire to exhibit such agreeable qualities as may be latent in them. Good people are so often deficient in tact, and think they are doing their duty by arousing their friends to a sense of dissatisfaction with themselves. It is a false and wrong move. Most people have the organ of love of approbation, and frequently, when approval is shown them, will strive to deserve it.

Madge spent a great deal of time at the Hall, where she was the welcomest of guests. Long ago Tom betrayed to June, from whom no power on earth could have induced him to keep a secret, how sagely Miss Madge had advised him on that morning, and June, so far from being displeased, had

laughed and said she was amazingly obliged to Madge, for she would certainly not have given in unless Tom had uttered the threat of leaving the country. "And then," she added, hanging on Tom's shoulder, "how much happiness I should have lost, my darling!"

"It would have been worse for me," cried Tom; but June would not allow this.

She, however, told Madge that, since she was such a wise young owl, she would be good enough to keep her wisdom to herself in future, and not attempt to furnish Tom with any hints about the management of his wife.

Madge plumed herself not a little on her Machiavellian policy.

"Your ladyship," she remarked loftily, "ought to go on your knees and thank me, as, but for me, you would certainly not be 'your ladyship' now."

"Well, dear child," said Lady Nevil, putting her arm round her cousin, "I will do my best to show my gratitude by looking out for a husband for you. Not as good a one as Tom, because there isn't such another, but the next best."

"I adore Tom," responded Madge, "but I don't think I should ever have fallen in love with him."

"Ah," said June, "you don't know him."

"You didn't once, I suppose," returned Madge mischievously.

"No," said June, "but then I was a goose."

"I hope you don't think me a goose for not falling in love with him," observed Madge drily.

"You would be a goose if you did," laughed June gaily, "because it would be no use."

Tom had caused a monument in white marble to be erected to Mrs. Rivers' memory in the churchyard. It was the wonder and admiration of the whole district. And on it was printed an inscription breathing such love, reverence, devotion, that, for once, his mother, callous as she was, felt, on reading it, a distinct pang.

Every morning a fresh wreath was placed on the grave; oftener than not, Tom and June went down together and laid it there. And never could June read that inscription without the tears coming to her eyes—without thinking how good God was—how rightly that dear mother had judged what was best for her, and how blessed and happy she was in being Tom's wife.

Between June and Mrs. Ellesmere the most cordial relations existed. Mrs. Ellesmere had far too much tact to give advice or suggestions unless they were asked for, and it seemed as if June could not treat her with sufficient honour or consideration when she

came to visit them. And June's influence caused a greater *rapprochement* between mother and son than had ever existed before. Mrs. Ellesmere said very graciously to Tom:

"My dear boy, you were most happy in your choice. If you had searched the world over, you could not have found a more charming wife."

This so moved Tom that he embraced his mother, a most rare event, and immediately set his brains to work to think what present he could make her, as was his invariable custom when his heart warmed to anyone.

Mrs. Ellesmere elected not to live at the Dower House, which was accordingly let. She cared little for the country, and did not like to be second where she had so long been first. She therefore went to live in London. But the Hall doors were always ready to fly back on their hinges for her, and not only for her, but for any friends whom she wished to invite. Tom and June were both hospitable by nature, and June had a love of society which, so far, had had little opportunity of being developed.

In the winter there was talk of taking a house in town for the season, and of Lady Nevil being presented, but, when the time came, circumstances interfered with this arrangement and they only spent three weeks at a hotel instead.

June was delighted beyond measure with her stay, and thought London a sort of El Dorado. She loved sitting in the Row, and driving about the streets and in the Park; she delighted in shopping—picture galleries charmed her; dinner parties she did not care for, but the play she found a source of boundless enjoyment. Poor Tom, to whom, except for June's sake, it was all odious and detestable, endured his purgatory with a smiling face. A frock coat and a tall hat were to his way of thinking akin to Chinese tortures; he liked the play well enough if it made him laugh, but a pathetic piece was abhorrent to him—as for the opera, he infinitely preferred church to it, and, altogether, the pleasures of London life were things he entirely failed to understand or appreciate. But he saw that June was happy, and that was quite sufficient incentive to him to make a martyr of himself.

They often met Dallas, but not a single pang was caused in the breast of any of the trio by these meetings. Tom and June adored each other; Dallas was desperately in love with a charming young lady whom he was not rich enough to marry. (Dallas could never love thoroughly unless there was some impediment to his bliss.) He thought Lady Nevil the perfection of a lady and of a wife for Tom, but had entirely forgotten the little episode down at the

Hall two summers ago. He talked of her to Mrs. Trevanion when he could spare a moment from descanting on his own love, wretchedness, hopes, and fears; and he talked a great deal to June about Mrs. Trevanion. Finally he presented them to each other one morning in the Row, and Mrs. Trevanion invited Lady Nevil to luncheon, and the two ladies, for a wonder, struck up a great friendship. For, as a rule, when a man is bent upon two women he likes becoming friends, he either defeats his own object by praising each extravagantly to the other, or else the natural perversity of the sex prevents their selecting a friend at the dictation of another person. Women, I think, seldom care about two men they like being friendly with each other.

Mrs. Trevanion was charmed with June.

"She's such a lady," Dallas had said, and Mrs. Trevanion, who was rather a good judge, thoroughly endorsed his remark.

June's charming gracious manner, her refinement, her modesty, her thorough freshness delighted Mrs. Trevanion; she was also very favourably impressed with Tom, who, for his part, declared that he had never got on so well nor felt so perfectly at ease with a woman before.

As for June, she took an extraordinary fancy to

Mrs. Trevanion and could not rest until that lady had promised to visit the Hall immediately after the London season.

Tom returned home with rapture after his three weeks of penance for love's sake, but June was very sorry to leave the delights of the great city behind. Her mother-in-law pressed her to remain another week as her guest, but that would not have been the same. At this time, there could be no happiness for June where Tom was not.

Madge had spent a week with them and was in ecstasies at her glimpse of town life. On June's return to the Hall, the two young ladies had long talks about the pleasures of London and were both rather hurt when Tom expressed, in no measured terms, his abhorrence of the town and his adoration of the country.

With the title, Tom had acquired a seat in the north of England, and a considerable increase of income. He insisted on Mrs. Nevil remaining at Nevil Court for a year, and behaved to her with so much kindness and consideration that, despite the seeming hardness of her fate, she could not feel one pang of bitterness against him or his wife. For June was ever the first to prompt and encourage Tom's generous proclivities. The poor worshipped her.

Mrs. Ellesmere, though she had been liberal enough to them, was too fine a lady to go and sit in their cottages, listen to their woes, and give that kindly sympathy which adds a warmth of its own to soup, coals, and blankets. June had smiles for their joys—few enough, poor souls, the poor have, and those of the simplest!—and ready, natural tears for their woes. Her kind heart could never hear of others' misfortunes without being touched by them, and to be touched, with June, was synonymous with trying to help. And as she was rich, since all Tom had belonged equally to her, and, in their eyes at least, a very great lady, she could do an immense deal to alleviate the sufferings of her poor neighbours.

Nothing delighted Tom like hearing her ladyship's praises,—he would ten thousand times rather she had the credit of a kind action than himself; and when a petition was preferred to him was wont to reply, with a smile,

“Well, well! I must talk to her ladyship. I daresay she'll see to it.”

Tom deserved to be happy, and he was happy. When, in September, the bells rang and the announcement was made that there was an heir to the houses of Ellesmere and Nevil, his happiness seemed almost too much for him. Everybody in

the place was made the better for this glorious event, for we know the form Tom's happiness and gratitude were wont to take; and hearty were the prayers and thanksgivings offered up by the voices and from the hearts of the humble friends of the Squire and his lady.

Tom's devotion to his son was, even from his earliest infancy, a thing to witness. He spent hours in the nursery; it was almost incredible how handy he became in holding and nursing the child, who very soon knew him and was never known to cry in its father's arms, a fact of which Tom was amazingly proud. Happy as June was in seeing his delight, it now and then gave her a twinge of the heart which it would be wrong to call jealousy. But, as a matter of fact, she felt that she was less necessary to him than formerly; that a good many of his embraces were diverted from her to his heir, and that she was robbed of much of his society. And Tom had become so dear to her now that she wanted the outward proofs of his affection more than ever, and was not in the least disposed, after having all the love of her heart called forth, to sink into a common-place, jog-trot, prosaic state of domestic bliss. She desired what most wives desire in vain: that her husband should remain her lover; but Tom, after the manner of his fellows, feeling secure in the

possession of his beloved, thought it time to have done with hopes and fears and turbulent emotions, and to enter upon a quiet, comfortable, peaceable life. June was as dear to him as ever—dearer, if anything, but he considered his love for her as a fact to be taken for granted and not one that required perpetual demonstration.

Still June was exceedingly happy, as she had indeed every reason to be.

After Christmas, they were to have a series of guests at the Hall. Dallas was to come for a couple of days, for Tom would have laughed to scorn the thought of being jealous of any living man now. Mrs. Trevanion and her son, an Eton boy of seventeen, were expected, and two or three other young people for Madge's especial benefit.

Madge adored June more than ever, and June had promised that, if they took a house for the season in town, Madge should go to them for a whole month. Tom made a terribly wry face over the house in town, but he had no idea of thwarting June, who was rather bent upon it, and only stipulated that he should be there on and off, and that the baby should not be taken to Pandemonium. Her ladyship wanted the whole family to migrate, and the first time there had ever been the shadow

of a tiff between them was when Tom offered serious opposition to her wishes on this score. Tom would not have that precious life endangered by the pestilential atmosphere of London. June was not used to hearing him say *would* and *would not*. And, as the young Sir Thomas was as robust as any infant in the world, she was rather incensed at what she chose to consider her husband's foolishness.

So she shed some tears of mixed anger, pain, and humiliation, and said, being "very like a woman," that he did not care whether she was injured by going to London; to which he, after kissing away her tears, replied with sound good sense that it was not by his wish she was going, and he would gladly put down five hundred pounds there and then if she would relinquish the idea.

But this her ladyship was not disposed to do. Her mother-in-law had told her that this step was due and becoming to her position, and June, being young and keenly disposed for pleasure and enjoyment, had rather set her heart on a London season.

Tom gave in to everything she wished except about the baby. If she had known that Tom's obstinacy was being fostered by Agnes, she would pro-

bably have set very vigorously to work to counter-balance that amiable young lady's influence.

Agnes affected an unbounded devotion to Tom's son and heir—perhaps she felt it. She ingratiated herself with the nurse, waylaid her when she walked abroad, paid constant visits to the nursery at such times when June was likely to be out driving. This brought her into frequent contact with Sir Thomas, and he became quite grateful for her devotion to his child, and entirely forgave and forgot the bad turn she had done him in trying to delay his marriage. She made little innuendoes accentuated by sighs or notes of exclamation. How could June leave that darling! how could anyone, surrounded by such blessings, with such a child, such a husband, want to quit them for a life such as people led in London—heartless, selfish, unsatisfying! What could compensate for home joys? For her part, it was utterly incomprehensible to her. Tom defended his wife—said she was young and beautiful, and fond of pleasure—what more natural than that she should like to go into society? Besides, it was chiefly his mother's doing, who had persuaded her. But Agnes' words certainly stabbed him in a tender spot.

“But for *both* of you to go away and leave that darling!” cried Agnes, with a tear in her eye. “Suppose he should be seized with convulsions, or

something were to happen to him! Servants are never of any use in an emergency."

"Oh," said Tom, not without a sense of alarm at her words, "I shall be here most of the time."

"June will not let you. She will not stay in London without you. I wonder it does not occur to her how dreadful it is to leave that angel to hirelings!"

"June wants to take him with us—she is most anxious not to be parted from him."

"But it would be madness to take him to London. Here you know he has the purest milk from your own cows, and I have heard that hundreds and thousands of babies die in London of typhoid fever from impure milk."

Tom, only too ready to take alarm, vowed to himself that, whatever happened, that precious life should not be endangered by a visit to the metropolis.

"One thing," said Agnes, with fervour, "I shall go up to the Hall every day to see the darling, and I don't think anything will escape my eye. I suppose," hesitating, "June will not consider me too officious, will she?"

"Officious!" replied Tom heartily, "she will be tremendously grateful to you."

“And—and when you are in town, shall I write to you about him? I could tell you a thousand particulars about your darling that servants would not think of writing. And writing is naturally a great effort to them.”

“Will you?” cried Tom. “That will be awfully good of you.”

“I shall write to *you*,” proceeded Agnes, in a low voice. “I suppose June will not mind. We are cousins, you know.”

Tom is not imaginative, neither has he a vestige of conceit. Being married and the sole property of June, it never enters his brain that Agnes retains any of the old feeling for him. She is devoted to the baby—all good women are devoted to babies. He is too loyal to say it, even to himself, but he would like to see June hanging rapturously over her babe, and does not realise that her devotion to himself restrains the ecstasies which some young mothers lavish on their infants. If a woman’s heart is wrapped up in a man, she cannot have the same intense love of her child; the women who make adoring mothers of babies are, as a general rule, not very happy wives, or only entertain a moderate affection for their lords. Probably no woman on earth loves husband and children equally—one must yield to the other.

I should be very sorry to give the impression that June was not a fond mother; nothing could be prettier than to see her with her child; but Tom was first in her heart.

Men, though they may be indifferent to and probably a good deal bored by babies, even their own, think it shocking and unnatural that any woman should not worship these infant treasures; it is a perhaps unacknowledged creed with a man that a woman who has a baby can want nothing more, and must find in it a source of inexhaustible rapture and amusement. But the temperaments of women differ as much as those of men, and surely it is hard to expect of a young creature just entering upon life, with a passionate desire for pleasure and enjoyment, that she shall be ready at once to sink and merge all her own existence in that of a little creature who is unable to understand or sympathise with her in the smallest degree, and whose strongest attraction for her is its weakness and dependence upon her. But she, too, wants a support to lean on!

It is when women grow older—women and men too—and have lived the best part of their own lives, that their children become such an immense resource and interest to them.

I am sure that nineteen men out of twenty will be rather scandalised by my assertion on this sub-

ject; but perhaps it would be better for their domestic bliss if they realised that they have no right to shunt their duties and responsibilities on to the feeble shoulders of their offspring.

CHAPTER II.

THE arrival of Sir Thomas and Lady Nevil at No.—, Eaton Square, for the season was duly chronicled in the fashionable journals.

June felt that she would have been quite happy if she could but have brought the baby: Tom was rather melancholy, and found the only redeeming point of his penance in the society of his wife. Half his heart was left behind at the Hall, and all his amusements and interests. Suppose something should happen to that treasure in their absence! His one consolation was in the thought of Agnes.

June was to do everything in the style which befitted her position; her husband bought her a fine pair of horses, thinking those she had in the country not smart enough for London; he particularly desired that she should be beautifully dressed, he presented her with a diamond tiara on the occasion of her going to Court, and June would have been quite happy—if—he would have allowed the child to come to town, and—if—it had not been painfully evident that his heart was not in anything he did,

and that he was bored to death and would have given the world to get away. For Tom, the kindest, best, most generous creature in the world, did not possess the power of hiding his feelings; he would sacrifice a great deal to make anyone he loved happy, and would refrain from reminding them in words that he was doing penance, but he could not control his face.

June had got her own way in coming to London, but it did not make her very happy. She felt a sense of secret irritation against Tom for not being happy too, and she was vexed because he had been so obstinate about the baby. Until now she had not believed him capable of offering persistent opposition to any wish of hers. And his scruples were absurd! The house was large and airy, it looked on green trees, they were near both the parks. London was healthy, the child was thoroughly robust; if he were here, Tom would never be able to tear himself away from the pair of them, and she would not have the irritation of seeing Agnes' daily bulletins, which frequently were not bulletins but epistles. If the nurse, if her aunt had written she would have been delighted; but she had that instinct of dislike and distrust towards her cousin which, after all, was a perfectly true and correct one. Just as in their younger days, Agnes had

always tried to appear additionally amiable by the hateful knack of showing sister and cousin to disadvantage; so now, June felt that all this effusiveness over the baby was put on to make her seem wanting in a mother's devotion. Sir Thomas and Lady Nevil had been in town five days; this evening they were dining at home alone.

An unusually gushing letter had arrived that morning, which had given the most evident pleasure to Tom and had roused June's ire. All day long it had been smouldering; she had made up her mind to assert herself that night. She *would* conquer. Her mind was master of Tom's, even though she could no longer quite turn him round her finger by a frown or a tear as in olden days. She was not quite sure what would be the best way to take him, but she would certainly begin by coaxing, even though it had failed once or twice before when tried on that particular subject.

After dinner, when they went upstairs, she pushed him gently into a chair, sat on his knee, laced her arms round his neck, and laid her cheek against his. He received her attentions with the complacent calm of a two years' old husband who loves his wife, the complacent calm that is so eminently provoking and unsatisfactory to wives of June's temperament.

"Tom," she says, ceasing to embrace him, and laying her head against the back of his chair, whilst an involuntary mist comes across her brown eyes, "Tom, I don't feel happy."

Tom heaves a deep, deep sigh.

"No, my dear," he replies, "I don't see how anyone can be happy in this stifling hole."

But this answer is by no means what June desires, or what she has wished to lead up to.

"It isn't that," she says, feeling much depressed. "I like London and should enjoy myself amazingly if I didn't see that you are not happy."

Tom heaves a still deeper sigh.

"I must bear it as best I can," he utters, in a doleful tone.

"It makes me feel selfish," says June, "to think I have dragged you here and that you are so wretched." Secretly she thinks he is a little bit selfish not to try to seem happier. "It takes away all my enjoyment."

Thereupon Tom kisses her kindly.

"Never mind me, dear," he remarks, "I must manage as best I can. And," brightening, "I shall run down and see the boy for a couple of days shortly."

"My darling," cries June, "do, *do* let us have him up here! Do get over your ridiculous ideas

about London hurting him, and then we should all be quite happy. There was a time," jealously, "when I could make you happy, but now it seems I am not enough."

"Don't say that, child!" exclaims Tom, giving her slim waist a squeeze. "Why, you surely wouldn't have me *not* love our boy!"

"Not more than me," says June rebelliously.

"No fear," he answers heartily. "But it's a different sort of feeling. Why," with an accent of reproach which June feels keenly, "do you think that if you had him in your arms all day, and had hardly even a kiss or a look for me, that I should feel a bit jealous! Why, I should know it was the right and natural thing."

Tom is not the least aware that he is planting a dagger in his wife's heart. She does love her child dearly, but he cannot be all in all to her. She can spare his presence a great deal better than she can Tom's; he would be an utterly inadequate consolation to her if anything happened to her husband.

She cannot bear to be parted from Tom for twenty-four hours, and she sees that, with that chief rival added to all the others in the country, it is probable that he will be a good deal away

from her during her sojourn in London, and the town has not yet sufficient attractions in her eyes to console her for the loss of her beloved one.

"As if," she pleads, "there were not hundreds and thousands of healthy children in London, and here it is so airy and nice."

"Airy!" echoes Tom; "why, I feel fit to be stifled myself; and think how much more his tender lungs would suffer."

"That is mere prejudice," answers June, a trifle shortly.

"But, my dear," says Tom, "only think how well the little chap is at home and how rosy he looks. And there is Agnes always looking after him."

June vacates her position on Tom's knee and walks to the window, on which she drums with her fingers. An angry swelling rises in her throat: it is a full minute before she can speak.

"I do not know what business it is of Agnes'," she observes presently. "And, as she has never had any experience with children, her looking after him can hardly be of much value."

"I think that is rather ungrateful of you," says Tom, with more warmth than is usual to him, especially when addressing his wife.

This is too much for June. She flings herself into a chair and gives vent to a passion of sobs and tears. For a wonder Tom does not fly at once to staunch her tears, but sits looking a shade sulky and perturbed. This, naturally, makes June worse.

"I wish we had never come to London at all," she sobs.

Tom echoes that wish most sincerely. In his heart he wonders what married people who are attached to each other, who have a beautiful home in the country, and, over and above all, a little angel of a child, can want amongst the "madding crowd." London is very well for girls in search of husbands, for dissipated young men, for married couples who do not get on, for worldly people without home ties, for professional and business men and their families; but for two persons so exceptionally blessed as themselves, where are its charms?

He, however, has the wisdom to remain silent. But silence is always exasperating to a vexed woman.

"Let us give up the house and go back home!" sobs her ladyship, who is in a considerable temper. "If I am only to be made miserable here, I wish I had never come."

This is extremely unjust, and so Tom feels it to be. But the most charming women in the world are apt to be unjust at times, for, if they were strong-minded enough never to be wayward or unreasonable, they would be wanting in one of the chief attributes of their sex. There is a distinction, though, between a charming woman and a weak one—the former knows when she is unjust and is ready to admit it afterwards, but nothing will ever induce the latter to own she has been in the wrong.

Tom does not speak, and June's wrath increases. She pulls her handkerchief from her face, and, looking at him with eyes flashing through her tears, she cries,

"The child is as much mine as yours! *much more mine!* What right have you to separate him from me or to decide what he shall do or not do!"

This is the first time that Tom has ever seen June in a passion—he is a good deal shocked and a little frightened.

He rises from his chair and comes towards her. But she starts up to evade him and cries,

"Do not come near me! do not touch me! You do not love me. Oh, my darling mother! if you were only alive now!"

And June, having worked herself up into a paroxysm of anguish, flings herself down and buries her head in the sofa-cushions and sobs as if her heart would break.

It is not acting, though a good deal of it is temper—she would never bring in that sacred name for the sake of getting her own way. But the effect is magical on Tom—remorse stirs his heart; he recalls all the tender injunctions of that dead mother about her darling, and his will is broken like a reed at the remembrance. It is true he is all she has—he is her defender, her support, her shield against trouble and sorrow—it is not for him to thwart and grieve her. She is dearer than ever, though the lover's first passion may have worn off—she shall be happy, cost what it may!

He kneels beside her, he pours out every endearing word he knows upon her, he covers her hair, her throat—for her face is averted from him—with kisses, he promises her that he will go and fetch little Tom to-morrow, and in due course June, half triumphant, but secretly a good deal ashamed of herself, is lying with her head on Tom's breast, his arms about her, and all his kind, honest heart bent on restoring her to peace of mind and happiness.

“When I have you both, I shall be quite, quite

happy," she murmurs; and Tom forgets for the time the horrors of London, and can only think of the perfect bliss of having both his treasures together.

Next morning, he telegraphs to the nurse to have everything ready for the journey to London in the afternoon. He is to proceed home by the ten o'clock train—the journey takes three hours—and he will be back in Eaton Square at seven, in plenty of time to dress for dinner, as they are dining out.

June, in the most radiant spirits, repairs to the milkman to order the choicest milk of the choicest cow for the heir of the Nevils and Ellesmeres, and goes to lunch with her mother-in-law, who expresses extreme satisfaction at Tom's silly scruples having been overcome.

When Lady Nevil returns home, about four o'clock, she receives a terrible shock at seeing an orange envelope lying on the hall table. I suppose no woman whose life is bound up in that of another mortal will ever be able to open a telegram without a pang of fear in the absence of her dear one. When, trembling in every limb, she has torn it open and mastered its contents, fear gives way to anger.

"Tom not quite the thing. Will not bring him to-day. Am writing. Nothing of least consequence."

In a moment June's thoughts fly to Agnes. She is certain this is her doing—and after last night! Has that hateful—yes, hateful is the name she applies with its fullest meaning to her cousin—that hateful woman more influence with Tom than she? Why, the telegram proves that it is a mere pretence. *Nothing of the least consequence.* She sees it all perfectly. Agnes has been talking to Tom, and Tom is so entranced at getting back to his beloved home that he is just stopping on for his own gratification. Never has June felt so bitter in her life.

Then this dinner to which they are engaged! A hostess is naturally vexed at having her party disarranged at the last moment. There is nothing for it, however, but to write an explanation, and to say she will either dine without her husband or stay away from the dinner, whichever puts Lady X—— to the least inconvenience. As a matter of course, Lady X—— writes back, entreating Lady Nevil to come.

June is not exactly shy, but it is rather an ordeal to go to a big dinner alone; she, however, acquits

herself with grace and self-possession, and is much admired, which she is in no humour to be aware of or to appreciate. Tom is not there, and she has not yet learned to do without him. She could never be a fashionable wife (of that she is quite sure), able to dispense with equanimity, if not pleasure, with her lord's society. What is he doing? He has probably just finished dinner, and is smoking his pipe in the garden, or has gone up to look at the boy asleep. Anyhow, June thinks with a little twinge, that officious Agnes cannot be up at the Hall now.

When she returns home, she feels more lonely still. She and Tom have never been parted for twenty-four hours since he went to bury his cousin just after their marriage. She tries to speak cheerfully to her maid whilst her hair is being brushed—she makes a little more of the baby's momentary indisposition than necessary; for, like a fond, proud wife, she would not for the world let any human being think she felt herself neglected by, or aggrieved against, her husband: but, when the woman has left her, she throws herself into a chair and sits there for a long time, looking straight before her, and suffering a new and unknown pang at her heart.

How lonely she feels! How dreary life would

be without Tom! Dreary! nay, how impossible! How do women live on after their husbands die! What should she do if anything happened to Tom? She would die too; she could not endure her life without him. Then she falls to wondering if he is thinking of her at this moment and missing her as she does him. She would be consoled could she but know that such was the case. She sighs; two tears follow the sigh. Why do men change after marriage? Women do not change. She loves him as passionately, is as unable to do without him, as in the first months of their life together; but he is not quite the same. He is so sure of her, that is why. Would it be better if he were not quite so sure? No, a thousand times. No! She will never have eyes for any other man than him, never feign one unfaithful look or thought.

Midnight struck; she began to feel nervous. Alone in London. Visions of burglars stole across her, and then unaccountable fears of she knew not what. She must be quick and get into bed, and yet she was almost too frightened to move. How unkind of Tom to go away and leave her! Her anger rose and partially overcame her fears. Once in bed with the candle out she felt safer, and, before long, love and anger were both forgotten, and she was sleeping like a child.

In the morning, when her maid brought her tea and letters, she eagerly opened the one from her lord. Having finished it, she laid it down and a cold chill came over her. She stared blankly into space for a minute or two, then took it up and re-read:

“DARLING WIFEY,

“I got down here all right and found the boy all right except a little bit flushed and” (here two letters easily deciphered to be Ag were scratched out) “we thought he might have another tooth coming, but, anyhow, we thought it better to wait a day and see. Don’t be frightened, darling; he is in capital spirits, and I hope to bring him up to-morrow, though I do hate the idea of London for him. I hope the dinner will go off all right. Of course you will say and do the right thing about me, and I daresay as long as they get you they’ll be very happy to dispense with my company. You can’t think how heavenly it is down here after London. I’ve got on an old shooting-coat, and I feel as happy as a king—at least I should, darling, if I had you here.

“I had to break off here to see Jones, and he tells me there are two or three things I ought to see to-morrow. Should you mind if we don’t come

up till Friday—it will give the boy another day's respite, and you can go about and see your friends and amuse yourself for that little time longer, can't you, dearest wifey.

“Always your most loving
and devoted husband,
“T. N.”

When she had read that affectionate, if not well-expressed epistle, all pleasure and happiness took flight from June's heart. She was nothing to Tom—he could dispense perfectly with her society, as long as he had the baby, and the country, and his old shooting-coat, and—with a fierce spasm—Agnes.

Not that in her heart of hearts she believed Tom had one thought of her cousin, but a woman's mind is ingenious in tormenting itself, and June was imaginative. But he was perfectly happy without *her*; and here she forgot that when the letter was written he had only been parted eight hours from her.

She wished now from the bottom of her heart that she had never come to London. And yet it seemed hard that she could not do as other women did. Still, if she wanted Tom's constant society, there was no doubt she must make up her mind to

live in the country year in and year out, and to be satisfied with a Darby and Joan life. That was not a very terrible thought to her, since, after all, it was Tom's presence or absence that made her happiness or woe.

Then she thought of Agnes, and clenched her little white teeth with wrath. This was her doing, she knew. Perhaps she would not even let Tom come to-morrow, but would persuade him that the child had some ailment or other—perhaps she would give him something to make him seem ill. When one woman thoroughly detests another, she is willing to believe her capable of anything diabolical.

Then June's pride flew up in arms. She made up her mind to telegraph to Tom, desiring urgently that he and the child should come up at once. But suppose Tom telegraphed back that it was impossible!

Suddenly a fresh inspiration came to her. She would go herself and bring them back. Agnes should be shown with whom she had to deal.

June glanced at the clock, the hands were just on the hour of nine—impossible to catch the ten train, but there was another at eleven, which stopped at a station six miles from the Hall. She rang the

bell, sent for a form and wrote a telegram, desiring that a carriage might meet her at L.; despatched a line to her mother-in-law, and with a mixture of triumph, defiance and anger in her breast, set out on her journey to bring back the truant.

CHAPTER III.

JUNE had a fine spirit and it was now roused to the uttermost. During her journey in the train, she made a great effort to conquer the anger that was seething and bubbling up in her heart; anger partly excited by Tom, but chiefly by Agnes.

She was, however, consoled by the thought that they would soon be made aware, were already aware from her telegram, that she was an important factor in the family arrangements, and was not to be treated quite as an automaton.

June had tact and common-sense as well as spirit, but everyone who knows anything of life or has any experience of character must be perfectly aware that when a woman loves ardently, the first two excellent qualities go immediately to the wall when any conflict takes place between them and her passion.

June talked to herself seriously all the way down to L. She said:

"I must not seem to be angry or shew any temper. Of course Tom will come and meet me

and I shall smile at and be very affectionate to him, and say I could not bear to be any longer without them and so I came myself. I daresay afterwards I shall let him know that I was not quite pleased, but just at first I will be everything that is charming. If I am cross it will only make that (I don't know what June called Agnes in her thoughts—probably serpent—) look all the more sweet. I don't know how on earth I shall control myself to be civil to her, but I must,—ah! wait till I get them away from her!”

They were nearing L. June wreathed her face in smiles, her heart beat a little faster: was she not going to meet her darling! She put her pretty head out of the train before it quite stopped, looking eagerly for that stalwart form. But there was no one who looked at all like Tom. A cold feeling of disappointment stole across her. Then she looked out for a servant, but no familiar face appeared.

The station-master, catching sight of her ladyship, hurried forward.

She spoke very graciously to him, and asked if her carriage was there.

He had not seen it. How strange! And her ladyship had telegraphed nearly five hours ago. He would send over to the inn at once and order a carriage.

June walked up and down the platform with a swelling heart. Of course Tom had not got the telegram; it was not his fault; but all the same she felt bitterly vexed, she could not meet him smilingly and affectionately now. And it was past two and she had eaten nothing but a biscuit, and distinctly felt the pangs of hunger. She was annoyed too, being extremely considerate for others, that her maid had gone dinnerless. Now she insisted on the woman going across to the inn to have something to eat, but she would not be persuaded to do the same herself. It seemed an age before the fly came round, a close one with a lean old horse. It was a glorious day and June wanted to breathe the air, but everything seemed bound to go wrong to-day.

The maid having refreshed herself with a glass of ale and a sandwich, was naturally more cheerful and uttered respectful condolences from time to time and speculations about the telegram. She thought Sir Thomas *would* be vexed at her ladyship being so put out of the way, and very likely they would meet the carriage coming for them. But they had to drive every inch of the road in the stuffy old brougham.

When they reached the house, Lady Nevil signed to the driver to let her out before he rang the bell—the hall door was ajar, she ran first into

the morning-room. A pleasing sight greeted her through the window. Tom was sitting on a garden chair with the boy in his arms. Agnes was kneeling at their feet, dangling something in front of the baby's eyes.

It was too much for poor June. She had just time to say to the footman, who came rushing in great surprise through the hall,

"Tell Sir Thomas I have gone to my room," and she flew upstairs, locked the door to keep her maid or any intruder but Tom out, and burst into a passion of tears. She was thoroughly upset; she felt that she had made a fool of herself, and that she would appear in the very worst possible light before the eyes of the man she loved, but it was stronger than she!

She heard Tom flying up the stairs, and had just time to unlock the door when he burst in with an astonished but beaming face.

"You here, my darling? Why, what has brought you? Why didn't you telegraph? What, in God's name, has happened?" as a sudden idea strikes him at sight of June's agitation that his mother is dead, and she has come to break the news to him. Tom is not imaginative, but when we see our nearest and dearest in deepest tribulation, it is

only natural to jump to some startling conclusion.

June is mortified to the quick. She meant to come home a great and smiling lady, to show with sweetness but dignity who was master at the Hall; and here is a lame and impotent conclusion! She feels rather more like a child who has run away from school and is going to be whipped for her pains.

Then that happens to her which frequently happens to high-spirited, impulsive people—she does the very thing against which she has cautioned herself; which she has resolved most positively that she will not do. She reproaches Tom for leaving her; for his letter; for his indifference in having remained away from her; for his untruthfulness in pretending the child was ailing, and, last and crowning folly, for which she is furious with herself even whilst she is committing it, she twits him with preferring the society of Agnes to her own.

Tom stands overwhelmed and silent, not because he is convicted of guilt, but because he is shocked at this outburst from his wife. He has heard that women are capricious, unjust, unreasonable, perverse creatures, but, along with his exceed-

ing love for June, he has always had such an immense respect and esteem for her. She is letting herself down with a vengeance now, and poor June is intensely conscious of what she is doing and what he is thinking, and yet is quite unable to stop herself. His absolute silence provokes her and makes her say ten times more than she means—twenty times more than she believes.

Finally she winds up with,

“Now I shall ask you to allow me to have my child, if Agnes can spare him; and as I have no wish to see her, you will please kindly intimate to her that her presence here is no longer required. And perhaps you would be so good, as I have had nothing to eat all day, to tell Horton to send me up some luncheon here.”

I fear I am departing from the custom of authors (which is to make their heroines always do and say what is sweet and amiable and strictly becoming) in betraying June's behaviour on this unfortunate occasion. Public opinion will be very much against her. But let me ask you, gentlemen, who are experienced in the moods and ways of the fair—have you not found that the women who were most charming as a rule, and whom you have perhaps loved with the most passionate ardour, have

occasionally given you these disagreeable little surprises? It is in this way that they vindicate their thorough *womanliness* and allay your fears lest they should be too angelic and too good to be mated to your imperfections.

Tom went gloomily out and downstairs, not forgetting first to order luncheon to be sent up immediately. Poor little girl, no doubt she was overdone, but that did not quite account for and excuse the bitter and unjust things she had said to him. He went out on the lawn, where Agnes was playing with Tom junior, and exhibiting increased fervour and devotion towards him.

"Oh, Tom," she cries, as he approaches her, "has dear June really come back! and may I take baby to her? Isn't she dying to see him?"

Tom's ingenuous face shows her that something is wrong, very wrong; but she does not choose to see it. She is already moving off towards the house.

"Wait a bit, Aggie," utters Sir Thomas. He is dreadfully perplexed, it does seem cruelly unnatural that June, instead of being grateful to Agnes for her devotion to the boy, should be irritated and angered by it. He feels it would be very unwise to let the two ladies meet, but he cannot bear the

thought of seeming ungracious or ungrateful to his cousin. Agnes understands what is in his mind, and is secretly pleased.

"June is rather done up," proceeds Tom, "she sent a telegram for the carriage to meet her, and why the deuce it has not come I can't make out; and so she had to come all the way from L. in a wretched old shut-up trap, and she's had nothing to eat. I don't suppose she's up to seeing you just yet, but I'll take the boy to her."

"Poor darling June," says Agnes, sweetly. "How unlucky! But what made her come? Was it because she was so anxious about this treasure? Oh, Tom, I begged you to be careful not to frighten her."

Tom has taken his heir from her arms and is proceeding towards the house.

"You will let me know the moment she would like to see me, won't you?" entreats Agnes, and he says,

"Oh, yes, of course," feeling that to give this kind, good creature the hint that June has commanded him, is an outrage of which as a man he is incapable.

Lady Nevil is rather in a dilemma. She would not for all the world have anyone know that she

has been scolding Tom and crying, so it is absolutely necessary that for the present no one shall see her. Tom has to act as nurse and maid—to bring in the child and the luncheon, and he waits on her with apparent alacrity but a heavy heart. He cannot forget that Agnes is waiting outside in the cold (figuratively speaking). But when he sees June hanging over their child, caressing and uttering all manner of sweet endearments to it, and little Tom cooing in his mother's face, the sight is so delightful to him that it effaces every other feeling, save the guilty sense of ingratitude to Agnes.

June has recovered herself. It is humiliating to own that a heroine's temper is considerably affected by her luncheon being delayed two hours, but more bliss and misery are produced by the digestive functions than one can realise. What a dreadful blow to romance to think that a mutton-chop may alter a violent and vindictive mood to a sweet and benevolent one!

June has lunched, has had her say out, also a great help to recovering equanimity, and now feels herself quite capable of behaving with the dignity and sweetness on which she had resolved in the train. To the immense relief of Sir Thomas, who has been longing but not daring to beg an audience

for his cousin, she asks in quite an amiable tone if Agnes is still there, and volunteers to go down and see her.

All traces of tears and vexation are removed from her ladyship's face by this time. She graciously interviews the nurse and confides Master Nevil to her care, and then goes downstairs hanging affectionately, perhaps a trifle ostentatiously so, on the arm of her lord. She even submits to Agnes' kiss, which is exceedingly unpleasant and repugnant to her.

"I hope Tom did not frighten you about that darling," says Agnes. "I begged him not, but we were a little bit anxious about him yesterday, were we not?" appealing softly to Sir Thomas.

"Yes," responds June, "his letter did make me a little anxious; that is why I came. And I am delighted to find that we were made uneasy without the very smallest cause. But it is all right now, and in future I shall keep them both under my own eye."

"Yes," says Agnes, "that is what you ought to do, what every wife and mother ought to do. For, after all, what is society in comparison with one's nearest and dearest?"

June feels her gorge rising.

"How are Auntie and Madge?" she asks. "I want to see Madgy about her visit to us. We will walk down to the Rectory with you now, Agnes, if you don't mind."

Miss Ellesmere is compelled to accept this broad hint, and the trio start off together; June, not usually so demonstrative in public, still leaning on her husband's stalwart arm. Madge is radiant at sight of her beloved cousin, whom she swiftly takes aside.

"I am so delighted you came, my sweet love!" she cries rapturously when they are alone. "The way Agnes works on Tom's feelings about that child is too ridiculous. She never cared for babies. I believe she is only making pretence now, to get at Tom and to annoy you. Take them off with you and keep them out of her way."

"That is what I came for," replies June. "But you don't suppose, Madge," with a fine curl of her lip, "that she thinks to put her influence with Tom in the scale against mine."

"Oh, my dear, I don't know what she thinks. She must be a precious goose if she does. But I never trust people who do spiteful, underhand things under the cloak of sweetness and religion. And, of course, it's so easy to work upon Tom, because, al-

though he is less selfish than most men, she is working upon his inclinations. He likes to muddle about the country for everlasting with you and the child; but if his duty to you both compelled him to spend his time in a place he hates, like London, why then, perhaps, he might take a different view of the matter. Tom is a dear, but he was meant to live with carrots and turnips; and you are a dear and are meant to go into society and amuse people and be admired, and you ought to take it in turns to give in to each other. I don't see why it should be all on one side. Oh, Juny! how I am longing for the fifteenth of next month. If anything were to happen to prevent my going to you then, I should drown myself!"

"We will have 'a great time,'" says June, and kisses her. "I hope to have some delightful balls for you."

"Juny," utters Madge, diffidently, "do you think that in London any man, any man worth having I mean, will look at me?"

June eyes her cousin deliberately. Madge is certainly a very fine young woman, with good eyes, a fair skin, and two rows of undeniable pearls.

"Yes, my dear, I think they will look at you a good deal," she answers, with an air of conviction.

Sir Thomas and Lady Nevil have dined, and are sitting at the open window in her ladyship's boudoir. June is on his knee, with one arm round his neck, and a little white hand prisoner in his.

"Kiss me, darling," she says, and he, nothing loth, obeys.

"I was naughty to-day," she proceeds, with a charming, contrite little air, "and now I am sorry."

Sir Thomas gives a squeeze to her slim waist to intimate that whatever she has done is condoned, and that no more need be said about it.

"I was so hungry, and I felt so cross, and it was so aggravating being boxed up in that horrid fly."

"Of course, darling."

"And then," proceeds June, "to see you looking so happy without me, just as if you had forgotten my existence!"

"Don't say that, darling," implores Tom, with an emphasized squeeze, which makes June utter a little cry.

"You forget how dreadfully strong you are," she says piteously, rather liking to trade upon the weakness which is the especial grace of her sex.

When Tom has apologised, she proceeds, wishing to convince herself as well as him.

"I think a person without a temper would be a very namby-pamby, stupid creature."

Tom looks dubious.

"Don't you?" she says, passing her hand caressingly down his face.

"Perhaps," he answers, being most anxious to propitiate her.

"Do you think I have a bad temper?"—coaxingly.

"No, my pet, certainly not. But," diffidently, fancying, good, honest soul, that he is speaking a word in season, when he is doing exactly the reverse, "I think you were a little hard on poor Aggie."

June sits bolt upright in a moment.

"Don't mention her name!" she says, in a tone of exasperation. Then, checking herself, and sinking back on his shoulder, "Let us forget that she or anybody else exists in the world but ourselves."

"Except the boy," amends Tom.

"Except the boy, of course," says June smiling. "Let us go and look at him, shall we?"

And as, a minute later, Tom stands with his arm round his beautiful wife, looking at the cherub

face of their child sweetly asleep, he offers up a reverent thanksgiving to God, and something for the moment prevents his seeing that lovely picture quite clearly.

If only there were no such place as London!

CHAPTER IV.

THE Nevil family have been established in London for the space of a fortnight. Tom junior is in the most robust health and spirits, and seems vastly amused and interested with all he sees. He is nearly nine months old, and is not only a beautiful and good-tempered infant, but has the most intelligent face in the world. He is, to Tom's intense delight, the living image of his mother—nay, Tom is almost affronted if anyone pretends for civility's sake that his heir resembles himself.

In the morning, before June requires his escort, Tom, in a shooting-coat and pot hat, and with (must it be told?) his pipe in his pocket, goes out with the nurse and young Tom in his perambulator. They invariably wend their way to St. James's Park, taking with them bread to feed the ducks. Although Tom junior cannot yet speak, he makes it plainly understood that this interests him more than anything else.

When they get into unfrequented spots, Tom takes the boy in his arms and walks about with

him like the homeliest artisan father. When he is not on duty with her ladyship, he spends his afternoons much in the same manner—one day he takes nurse and the baby to Madame Tussaud's. He longs for the child to be able to talk and run by his side—most of all he longs to have him old enough to ride a pony.

Dallas, who is a frequent guest in Eaton Square, mischievously asks June if she thinks Tom is making love to the nurse, from whom he seems inseparable, and declares to Tom himself that no doubt he is taken for a Life-guardsman in plain clothes. Dallas and June are the best of friends—they have both completely forgotten that episode three years ago. For Dallas is absorbed in his hopeless passion for Lady Jane Wyldrose, daughter of the Earl of Sweet-briar; hopeless, not as far as the young lady herself is concerned, but only as regards her parents. They will not hear of her marriage with a man whose expectations are in the distant future, and who has the reputation of making love to every pretty woman he meets. For Dallas, whatever he may suffer secretly, is not of those who go about with long and melancholy faces, refusing comfort and turning churlishly from all other members of that sex to which his divinity belongs; on the contrary, to see his gay and debonnair bearing in

public, to see him dancing and sitting in corners with the pretty woman of the moment, you would imagine him the most heart-whole young gentleman in London. But Dallas, like the rest of us, can suffer, suffer acutely too; and does when he realises the hopelessness of his love.

Mrs. Ellesmere, Tom's mother, has a large and very select acquaintance—she is highly esteemed in her set. As a natural consequence, when June comes to London, she is cordially received by her mother-in-law's friends, and in a very short space of time she is eagerly sought on her own merits.

June loves pleasure—this life is delightful to her—she enjoys it to the full, and Tom is honestly proud and glad of her success, and watches her with, not only the pride of possession, but the entire confidence of a person who owns something that cannot be taken from him. When golden youths flock around her, when her slim waist is encircled by their arms—for she has a passion for dancing—he looks on beaming and happy; no jealous thought comes into his honest heart. Lady Nevil is immensely admired; she has grown into a charming woman; her adaptability, the first and chief quality of every charming woman, enables her to drop into this new and pleasant life as though she had been used to it from her cradle. She is a great favourite

with men, her vivacity and animation delight them; she has the art of making them pleased with themselves, and she is, as they say, "such a little lady." Men, as a rule, reflect the woman in whose company they are; those who least respect the sex are not likely to be coarse or familiar in manner to a refined woman, and, even in these degenerate times, men like a woman who can be amusing and on good terms with them and yet retain her dignity. Men—even bold men—are so easily rebuffed by a modest woman, and never bear her malice for checking them if they have deserved it. What men hate is a woman who will encourage them to the top of their bent one day, and snub them fiercely and rudely the next.

No *gentleman* should ever retort on a lady, but no *lady* ever gives him cause.

Lady Nevil danced with the "smart" young men, received their attention and gallantries with a smiling grace, which did not for a moment deceive them into thinking that she took them *au sérieux*, and enjoyed herself amazingly.

Poor Tom bore life as best he might, and extracted what pleasure he could from seeing June's happiness. He had been down to the Hall once from Saturday until Monday, but was astonished to find how much virtue had gone out of the place in

the absence of his two treasures. He did not find any consolation even in the company of Agnes.

"So I hear," that young lady said to him, "June is becoming quite a fashionable woman. One of these days she will be making you take a house in town for good and all."

"No fear," returned Tom, but the words rankled unpleasantly in his breast.

It wanted two days to the fifteenth of June, when Madge was to join her cousins in London. Lady Nevil came in from her drive in radiant spirits, she had spent a delightful day and was looking forward to one of *the* balls of the season to be given that night. Her maid met her in the hall with a scared face.

"Oh, my lady, don't be alarmed!" she said, whilst her look and manner were enough to terrify a nervous and imaginative person to death, "but Master Tom has been taken ill. Sir Thomas and the doctor are with him now."

June's heart stood still, her knees knocked together; in one instant the thought traversed her brain that her own selfishness was the cause of this awful calamity, that the child would die; that she would never forgive herself, that Tom would never forgive her. Then, without waiting for another word, she flew upstairs to the nursery.

Tom stood by the bedside with an agonised face, the doctor was bending over the child who was waxen pale with closed eyes.

A sort of paralysis crept over June. Tom did not move forward to greet her; his eyes having met hers as she entered returned to their agonised watch. She went mechanically towards him.

"What is it?" she whispered.

"I knew it from the first," he muttered. "I always said so. I knew London would be the death of him."

A sense of guilt and despair stole over June: ten minutes ago there had scarcely been a happier woman living than she, and now terror and misery engulfed her, every pleasant thing in life seemed irretrievably gone from her for ever.

All night she and Tom watched by the child's cot; not satisfied with one opinion, Tom sent for the first physician in London. He too looked grave, but spoke reassuringly and hoped the boy might take a favourable turn.

Once during that long miserable night, June went and put her arms round her husband's neck and leaned on his breast with stifled sobs; and he clasped her kindly, but she felt instinctively that he was holding her responsible for this awful calamity.

When she was alone for a moment with the

doctor, she asked him in imploring tones whether London was the cause of the child's illness, and he answered distinctly in the negative. It might have happened anywhere.

But June did not dare even to say this to Tom—she knew it would be waste of time and energy to attempt to convince him, so firmly was his mind fixed on this one idea. Oh, please God they should get the boy over this, and never, never again should he set foot in the accursed city!

Young Tom got over the crisis, and, with his father and mother, returned to the Hall on the fifth day after his attack. Though most of the servants were left behind in Eaton Square, it was almost an understood thing that neither Sir Thomas nor her ladyship would go back there. Sir Thomas was perfectly certain that he would not, and her ladyship did not feel as though, after the misery of those few days, she should ever care to see London again. It was only by Mrs. Ellesmere's persuasion that they decided not to give up the house, and move the whole establishment back at once to the Hall.

In a week's time Tom junior was restored to his usual robust health, and Tom senior to happiness and his wonted level spirits. He felt like a prisoner let loose; it was almost worth while to have suffered the discomfort to enjoy this blessed freedom.

June, her mind being reassured about her child, began to feel somewhat dull, and to think with a certain regret of the pleasant things she had left behind; and as for Madge, her eyes were red with crying, and she wore a woe-begone look quite unusual to her bright face.

"I know I am very silly and very selfish," she said to June one day, "but it has been such an awful disappointment to me."

And with this she burst into tears. Tom came in at the same moment.

"Why, Madgy!" he cried, with sincere concern, "what's the matter, my dear?"

"Poor child!" answered June, "she is so disappointed about her visit to London."

The same evening at dinner Sir Thomas observed to her ladyship,

"I've been thinking it over, Juny, and it seems rather a shame to disappoint Madge, poor little girl. Why should not you go back to town with her for a fortnight or three weeks? The servants and horses are there doing nothing, and we shall have to pay for the house all the same. And," looking at her, "you enjoy it so much yourself, it seems a pity you should be done out of it."

"I do not feel as if I should care for it now," June answered.

Tom, however, broached the subject to Madge, and bade her persuade her cousin, and Madge implored and entreated so earnestly that her ladyship yielded. It is understood that Tom will not accompany them, or even go up to London for a single day, and this in June's eyes deprives the prospect of any pleasure.

Once there, however, Madge is so wildly pleased and happy that her spirits are infectious, and June, if half the guilt is stripped from her gingerbread, still manages to be tolerably happy and amused. But there is many an hour when she feels bitterly that nothing can make up to her for Tom's absence—when she is fain to take the train and rush off to see him and the boy—when she wishes that she had never consented to return to London. There are moments, too, when she feels almost bitter against Tom; he cares more for the child than for her. Time was when he could not bear her out of his sight. How soon a man's love cools down!

As a matter of fact, Tom missed her sorely, but he fears to damp her pleasure by telling her so; and it is quite right, he argues to himself, that she should like gaiety and amusement, being young, beautiful and admired. Once now and then, perhaps, he has a qualm—it is his unconfessed idea of a perfect woman that she should be ever on

her knees in an attitude of adoration before her child.

As June is rather young for a chaperon, Mrs. Ellesmere generally accompanies the young ladies, but she has her own pursuits and cannot, as she justly says, be always running after them.

She frequently deposes her brother, a gallant bachelor of some fifty years, to escort them about; and he is in no wise loth to be the cavalier of two such charming creatures. Madge, to her extreme delight, is much admired. June has been thoughtful enough to superintend and make considerable additions to her cousin's wardrobe, and, to the girl at least, who has no *arrière-pensée*, no treasures in another place, no little guilty pricks of conscience, no disappointed love, it all seems like Paradise. She and Dallas become great friends, although, for a wonder, he does not even make-believe to make love to her, and she is not in the least sentimentally inclined, but entirely given over to the idea of fun and pleasure. It is surprising how soon she falls into the manners of a fashionable young lady, and with what aplomb she conducts herself to the other sex. She dances perfectly; she has plenty to say.

Mrs. Ellesmere, who generally chaperons the pair to balls, says graciously that she is quite satisfied with the success of her young people. She does

not look after June with the jealous eyes of a mother-in-law—on the contrary, she considers it desirable that June should be admired, and she admits to herself ungrudgingly that Lady Nevil's behaviour is all that it should be, according to the rules of propriety in vogue—rules strangely relaxed from those of her own day.

June and Madge were particularly fond of the play. One evening Colonel Alford, Mrs. Ellesmere's brother, and Dallas were to dine with them and take them to see a popular piece.

Just before dinner a note came by a hansom for Lady Nevil.

"Will you excuse me from dining," it said. "I will join you at the play. I am so very sorry, and hope I am not putting you to inconvenience."

This was from Dallas.

The piece had begun some time before he made his appearance, and June was startled to see how white and unlike himself he looked.

"Are you ill?" she whispered, as he sat down by her. "Why did you come if you don't feel up to it?"

"I am all right," he answered, in the same key. "At least I hope so. I have had rather a facer. Don't, like an angel, ask me any questions."

Certainly he was not at all himself, nor did he

exhibit his usual spirits during the whole evening. He sat gnawing the ends of his moustache and looking intensely pre-occupied, and June, who had a good deal of tact where her affections were not engaged, left him to himself, and between the acts talked chiefly to her other companions.

"What a bore you must have found me!" Dallas whispered as he put her into her brougham. "I am awfully sorry. If I could tell you, I know you would feel for me."

"Nothing about Lady Jane, I hope," she said, in the same key, for he had confided in her occasionally on the subject of his last love.

"No," he answered, "nothing to do with her; at least, I hope not."

"What was the matter with La-di-da?" asked Madge, as they drove off. "How glum he looked!"

"I do not know," laughed June. "Something concerning one of his loves, no doubt."

"Ah," remarked Madge, wisely, "he will get caught one of these days. Now, Juny, do you really suppose that a butterfly like Dallas can feel?"

"I think he can feel very much, whilst it lasts," June answered, for she was extremely fond of Dallas, in a sisterly way, and had quite forgotten the pangs he once caused her. "And I have not the least doubt that, when he marries and settles down, he

will make a devoted husband. I am sure he has a good heart and an affectionate disposition, but he has been rather spoiled."

"I should be very sorry to be Mrs. La-di-da," remarked Madge. "I should be so furious when other women ran after him and he was civil to them."

"Oh, I don't see how one could be jealous of one's husband," said her ladyship.

"No," returned Madge, drily, "I don't suppose you do. But Sir Thomas Nevil and Mr. Dallas Broke are two very different gentlemen. I don't suppose anyone will ever waste her time in trying to get Tom away from you—unless," laughing, "it is Agnes."

Somehow, June, instead of being amused as she generally was at her cousin's sallies, felt displeased and *froissée*.

But she successfully concealed her sentiments and changed the subject.

CHAPTER V.

THIS is what had happened to Dallas. In the afternoon, as he was sitting in his own rooms inditing a letter to the beloved of his heart, the door opened suddenly and a veiled lady entered with some little noise. There was no need for her to remove her veil to make Dallas aware that his visitor was Lady Dangerfield.

“Good God!” he cried, springing to his feet. “What is the matter?”

“His lordship knows all. I have left home for ever and I have come to you.”

Dallas grew white under the bronze with which the sun had dyed him. He went through a moment long and comprehensive as that of the drowning man. His love lost for ever, himself saddled with a virago whom he had certainly never loved and whom he abhorred to-day, his position ruined, his life done for; this was the tax on the pleasant and fashionable amusement of making love to one’s neighbour’s wife.

He stood staring at her—his face, always ex-

pressive of the emotion of the moment, wore a horror-struck expression, which could scarcely be flattering to her ladyship under the circumstances. She flew at him with bitter reproaches. That was the way with a man; a woman sacrificed everything for him, and then, the moment things went wrong, he wanted to cry off.

Dallas leaned against the chimney-piece gnawing his under-lip and incapable, in this desperate situation, of saying anything. He only felt an unutterable horror, a sickening sense of a lost life, of ruin, misery, wretchedness.

"*What* does he know? *How* does he know?" he gasped at length.

"I gave that wretch Amélie warning last night, and she went to him after luncheon to-day, and he came straight to me and made the most violent scene. It seems she found one of your letters and kept it—the fiend!"

Dallas racked his brain to remember what he could ever have written to her ladyship. He did not believe himself fool enough to have sent her a really compromising letter.

"What was in the letter?" he asked.

"I don't know. He would not let me see it; but he threatened me, and I told him I should leave him, and I have."

"But you can't stay here!" cried Dallas, with more energy than he had yet displayed, "any moment some one may come in and see you."

"What do I care!" cried her ladyship violently, bursting into a passion of sobs. "You have got me into this, and you must get me out of it."

Dallas felt himself a brute. He ought to soothe the grief of this distracted lady—the circumstances required expressions of tenderness on his part, and he felt nothing but anger, impatience and general despair. He must move heaven and earth to get her away from his rooms—to prevail on her if possible to go back home; but it was hopeless, knowing her moods as well as he did, to say a word until she had calmed down a little. And perhaps, after all, the worst would happen, and he would have to take and keep her for ever. What in the world had he ever seen in her! and then he thought agonisingly of the girl he loved, whom he looked upon as an angel, and who would now perhaps be lost to him for ever. The door opened again—very quietly this time: Dallas had not heard the slight preliminary tap: and Mrs. Trevanion came in. She was well in the room before she saw Lady Dangerfield crouched in a low chair sobbing violently. Then she paused, looked at Dallas' pale distracted face and grasped, in part at least, the situation. She prepared to re-

treat, and made a beckoning sign to him which he obeyed.

"What on earth does this mean?" she asked looking at him with frightened eyes. "My dear boy, how can you be so imprudent?"

"Imprudent!" he gasped. "I expect I am about ruined."

He leaned against the frame-work of the door looking the picture of despair.

"She has left Dangerfield and come to me—says he knows everything; and what in the name of Heaven am I going to do with her!"

"That is nonsense!" said Mrs. Trevanion sharply. "She must be mad. She cannot stay with you. Does she want to ruin you?"

"God knows! I suppose so," uttered Dallas despairingly.

"We must get her away from here somehow," said Mrs. Trevanion, who was as anxious about Dallas as she would have been had her own son been placed in a similar predicament.

"I don't know how," he answered. "When she is in one of her tempers, she won't listen to reason."

"I shall go and talk to her," said Mrs. Trevanion, with determination.

"Impossible!" cried Dallas in a smothered voice.

"She would never forgive me. Besides, awful as this business is, I can't shirk it."

"You must," replied his friend resolutely. "If this is known, you will never, *never* have a chance of marrying Lady Jane."

Dallas groaned — she had touched the right chord.

"You must go away and leave her to me."

He looked at her in profound astonishment.

"How can I!" he said. "I should look like a cur."

"On the contrary—you will prevent her from being fatally and everlastingly compromised, and I shall make her see reason. If that is all, I will take her to my own house. Do you think I am going to let you be ruined for life?"

"She will strangle you," said Dallas.

"Oh no, she won't. Come! get your hat at once, and go round to the club and look out of the window, and don't come back until you hear from me. I shall stop here with her until she goes, if she stays till midnight. Come, be quick! do as I tell you!"

"I can't," cried Dallas.

"But you must. Remember it is ten times more for her sake than yours. Tell your servant not to let anyone in, and tell my coachman, as you go out,

to walk the horses about. It won't do even for me to have my carriage stopping at your door for hours," smiling.

Dallas was so much in the habit of doing what his friend told him, that, in spite of dreadful misgivings, he obeyed her, and when the street-door closed upon him, Mrs. Trevanion went to interview Lady Dangerfield, feeling about as uncomfortable as she had ever done in her life.

"But," she argued to herself, "what is the use of a friend if she is not ready to make sacrifices when occasion demands?"

Lady Dangerfield had dried her tears, but she was more angry than before. She had been startled by Mrs. Trevanion's appearance, and she was furious with Dallas for going out of the room and leaving her all this time. She had paced up and down the room, and, suddenly, her eye falling on the blotting book, she had opened it and read the commencement of a very ardent love letter in Dallas' handwriting. He was to meet Lady Jane at a ball that night, and this tender epistle was to be slipped into her hand, as she would not probably be allowed to dance with him. Her ladyship had the pleasure of reading as follows:

"MY OWN DARLING,

"I *must* go to B. House to-night on the chance of seeing your dear face, for although it is purgatory to me to be in the room with you, and not dance with or talk to you, I can't keep away. I shall find some chance of giving you this. You know, darling, don't you, that I have not a thought away from you—that you are the only woman in the world I care for—in that sort of way, I mean—I swear——"

And here the letter left off, Lady Dangerfield having arrived when it reached that stage and put a sudden stop to his vows.

In an access of fury, her ladyship seized the unfinished letter, tore it into shreds, and stamped upon them. A moment later it dawned upon her that she had made a fool of herself. But it was too late now—the mischief was done. She was here, and Mrs. Trevanion had seen her and would spread the report all over London before this time to-morrow.

The handle of the door turned—she braced herself to attack Dallas with fresh invectives, when, to her surprise and rage, not he, but Mrs. Trevanion appeared. Her ladyship stood rooted to the spot, speechless.

Mrs. Trevanion went and sat down quietly in front of her.

"You do not know me very well, Lady Dangerfield," she said, "but I hope for once you will look upon me as a friend. It was quite by accident that I came in. Mr. Broke's man told me that he was alone, and I wanted to see him about going to the play to-morrow, and just ran upstairs to speak to him. You must think me impertinent if you choose, but it is very compromising for you to be here; my carriage is at the door—let me drive you home."

"I am extremely obliged to you," returned Lady Dangerfield, in her most crushing manner, "but when I leave, which I have no intention of doing at present, Mr. Broke will no doubt kindly have a cab fetched for me."

Mrs. Trevanion did not look in the least perturbed by her ladyship's displeasure, although she felt more uncomfortable than she had ever done in her life.

"Is it worth while sacrificing a position like yours for nothing?" she said calmly. "If you stay here, you will ruin your own future and Mr. Broke's also. You are a great lady, the wife of a rich man, you have one of the best positions in London—is it worth giving up all this for a man who does

not want the sacrifice, and whose prospects you would ruin for ever?"

"He has sent you to say this to me!" cried her ladyship furiously. "The miserable coward!"

"No—on the contrary, I have induced him *on your account* to leave the house, that it may be impossible for you to be compromised by being here. I am here; if we leave the house together, no one can say a word about it."

"You would like to have all the telling of the story yourself, I daresay," sneered Lady Dangerfield. "However, I shall not leave this room until I have told Mr. Broke what I think of him."

Mrs. Trevanion went and looked out of the window for a moment, then returned and confronted her ladyship.

"Let me be quite frank," she said, very coolly. "It is nothing to me if you ruin your life more than that I am sorry for any woman who brings misery upon herself, but I am devoted to Dallas, and, if anything happened to him, it would make me wretched. You know quite well what his circumstances are; he has only six or seven hundred a year, he is in debt, and he is madly in love, as everyone knows, with Lady Jane Wyldrose. What pleasure or happiness, in the name of Heaven, can you expect to get by dragging yourself through the

mire, and him with you? A great many of your friends would be delighted, no doubt, but it is hardly worth while doing it for their sakes, is it?"

Mrs. Trevanion's manner is so quiet and her tone so cool that they have a mesmeric effect on Lady Dangerfield; and every word is so true that it goes home. She stands with her face averted from the speaker, and a new light begins to dawn upon her. After all, she has committed this escapade in a fit of passion; his lordship has been very angry, but he said nothing about leaving her or turning her out of the house—she left it in an access of passion; he is not to know where she has been, unless Mrs. Trevanion betrays her, and that (with a pang of rage) she is not likely to do for Dallas' sake. But her head is not cool enough to reason, so she simply does what the impulse of temper prompts.

"I have not the least intention of sacrificing anything for Mr. Broke," she said contemptuously, behaving, figuratively speaking, like the ostrich, who puts its head in the sand. "I came to say something to him, and he ran away like a cur, so I can't say it. But I suppose," with sarcasm, "if *you* can come and see him, there is no reason why I should not do the same."

Mrs. Trevanion smiled.

"You flatter me very much," she said. "But

what a woman of my age can do is not quite what is permitted to a young woman like you."

Lady Dangerfield curls her lip superciliously, as though to say,

"You need not think you take me in by that."

"Well," she remarked, "we may as well go out together, and I will get into a hansom."

Mrs. Trevanion turned to her with a sudden movement.

"Just this once," she said, "make a friend of me and trust me. Let me drive you home—it will be better for you. And," looking Lady Dangerfield straight in the eyes, "think what you will of me, but when I give my word, it is sacred—*no one* shall ever know a syllable of this."

"I don't care whether they do or not," said her ladyship recklessly. "And I would not trust any woman in the world on her most sacred oath. But I think it quite possible, for the sake of your *dear Dallas*," scornfully, "that you will hold your tongue. All right, you can drive me home if you like, and then you can come back to be thanked and blessed by him."

Mrs. Trevanion does not stop to bandy words, but precedes her ladyship downstairs; opens the door, makes a sign to her servants, and is re-

joiced a minute later to be driving her companion home.

Lady Dangerfield gains sufficient self-possession before alighting to shake hands with Mrs. Trevanion and thank her for bringing her home. This is for the benefit of the servants. Then Mrs. Trevanion drives to South Audley Street and telegraphs to Dallas that he can return home. Naturally he takes a hansom and dashes off to his friend's house to hear details. He feels very small and crest-fallen over the affair, but he is quite aware that he has been saved from a terrible dilemma, and virtuously makes up his mind that it is very wrong indeed to make love to another man's wife, and that the only real happiness in life is to be married to an adorable and innocent young creature like his darling Jane. And when he pictures to himself these lawful and heavenly joys, he is smitten by an access of misery that they are not destined to be realised by him. And although her ladyship is safely at home, he does not by any means feel sure that he has heard the last of this business. No wonder he is absent at the play which he witnesses that night in company with Lady Nevil.

The following morning he received a letter from Lady Dangerfield, which was a choice specimen of invective malice and sarcasm, but it was dated from

her husband's house, and contained no hint of spending the future or any part of it in the society of Mr. Broke. Indeed, she went so far as to caution him against presuming to call at her door or approaching her in public. With a deep sigh of relief Dallas tore the letter into fifty pieces—she was his enemy for life.

He reflected on the curiousness of the fact that no one can thoroughly hate a person until one has first loved him. And of all bitter hatreds—hatreds that spring up with the rapidity of a noisome fungus, but do not, like it, die a speedy death, there is none fouler or bitterer than that bred by impure love.

Lord Dangerfield was a jealous and rather bad-tempered man. He did not, however, suspect his wife of anything beyond imprudence, nor had there been a word in Dallas' letter to arouse suspicions of a deeper nature. He abhorred an *esclandre*, and had no intention of doing more than frightening his wife into better behaviour. To her surprise and immense comfort, he forbore to recur again to the letter; they dined out together, after which she went to a ball and he to his club. At the ball a good-looking young attaché from one of the embassies was presented to her, and she straightway forgot all about Dallas (for the moment) and devoted herself

to fascinating her new acquaintance, a task in which she succeeded entirely to her own satisfaction. She was none the less Dallas's enemy for life, and, when a chance of doing him an injury should present itself, would not be in the least likely to forego her revenge.

CHAPTER VI.

JUNE was delighted to return home. As for Tom, his joy at recovering her was exuberant; he could hardly take his eyes off his darling, and returned for the nonce to the lover-like demonstrations of the first part of their married life which June in later days had so sorely missed. Her ladyship, sitting on Sir Thomas's knee after dinner, with her arms round his neck, wondered how she could possibly have lived without him for three weeks; and Tom told himself that life away from June, even in his much-loved home, was not a very good business.

The brown retriever sat very close to the pair, eyeing them with his yellow eyes and giving an occasional restless thud with his tail on the floor, saying plainly, "I am trying so hard to be sympathetic and not to feel jealous, but, please don't forget me," and June, who understood dog-language perfectly, stroked his head and assured him that his claims to being one of the family were not overlooked.

"I *am* so glad, my darling, to be with you again!" she said over and over again in that caress-

ing, flattering way of hers, so intoxicating from a pretty woman to a man who adores her. "And you are delighted to have me back, aren't you?"

Tom felt, as many of his race have done and are apt to do, how poor words are, and he would have liked to express his satisfaction in an embrace which might have endangered every bone in his wife's slim body. He shared the retriever's anxiety with his inability to express all he felt.

"You must always be affectionate," said June, laying her cheek against his, "it is not enough for you to be fond of me, but you must show me that you are. Oh, Tom! if you were always like this I should adore you to such a degree that I should not be able to bear you out of my sight."

"But my dear, darling girl," cried Tom, "I am always just like this. I have never felt the least different."

"Yes, you have," said June, pensively. "Sometimes I have not been able to realise that you were at all devoted to me—indeed, I have thought that I rather bored you than not."

Tom replied with a kiss.

"You should not tell stories, even in jest, little woman," he remarked.

"I am not jesting," said June, with great solemnity. "It is true, and it has often hurt me

most dreadfully. But," sitting upright and contemplating him, "if you ever go back to that state of things, I know the remedy. I shall go away again."

"*You shall not,*" cried Tom, with decision. "I cannot do without my wife, and she shall never leave me again."

But every woman will be quite sure that in spite of Sir Thomas's protestations, he gradually dropped back into his comfortable feeling of security when he became accustomed to his wife's continual presence, and unconsciously decreased the lover-like blandishments which he had heaped upon her when she first returned after her long absence.

June was extremely happy, however. Madge came up to the Hall every day, and the cousins talked with much interest of the incidents of their stay in town, and looked forward exceedingly to the advent of some of their London friends at the end of the month. Mrs. Trevanion was coming; Dallas was to spend a week with them, and also a Mr. Carslake, in whom Madge took a certain amount of interest, and who had evinced a decided partiality for her society. In her mind June had already arranged a marriage between the pair, as Mr. Carslake was in every way desirable, with the exception

of being perhaps rather too old. It would have seemed strange that so very grave and quiet a man should attract and be attracted by a mad-cap like Madge, did not the very smallest experience teach one that opposite and not similar qualities most frequently draw the sexes together. Madge was never so bright, so full of pranks and whims as when Mr. Carslake was present; and whatever his theories might be about the proprieties, and the gravity and bashfulness becoming young maidens, there can be no doubt that he looked upon our young lady's vagaries with the most benevolent toleration, not to say approval.

Agnes continued to be a thorn in the flesh to both sister and cousin. Madge openly defied and denounced her. June tried mightily to be magnanimous. She reminded herself how much more of every kind of worldly good she possessed than Agnes—riches, position, Tom's devotion, which most of all her cousin envied her, a beautiful child, numerous friends—she even accused herself of pettiness in feeling that hostility to Agnes, that desire to exhibit all these advantages before her envious eyes. But she was so intolerably irritating! She never came to the Hall without leaving a sting behind—she was studiedly sweet in manner, and yet she was always saying something, especially if Tom

were present, to put June in the wrong, or to make her appear in a less amiable light than was her wont. June was tempted at times to quarrel *à outrance* and banish her cousin altogether from the Hall, but she would have been sorry to vex her uncle and aunt, and she knew too that Tom would never be happy until the breach was repaired, and that discussions about Agnes were not productive of the best feeling between them. When Tom took Agnes' part and praised her, June was sure to lose her temper; and Tom was one of those kind, good-tempered creatures who cannot understand people falling into passions and saying sharp, perhaps unkind things they do not mean, solely to relieve the vexation of the moment.

There are men and women who can say, "I hate you and I never want to see you again," at a moment's notice to the being they love best in the world; the being from whom they can hardly endure an hour's separation. Ten minutes later may possibly find the speaker in the arms of the vituperated one, uttering every conceivable word of endearment and apology. Sober, even-tempered people do not understand these humours, and disapprove of them exceedingly. If they say "I hate you," they can very seldom be brought to any other utterance to the end of the chapter.

Intensely as Tom loved June, he had never forgotten the scene on the day when she took the Hall by storm, and June had an uneasy consciousness that he remembered it, and that she must not endanger his respect for her by showing off any more childish tempers. In his heart Tom did really think June unkind and unjust to Agnes, and marvelled greatly at it when her ladyship had, so to speak, everything and Agnes nothing but her own goodness and religiousness. So he tried to be all the kinder to his cousin, to atone for his wife's coldness, thereby defeating his own intentions and committing the gravest error of tact. But then Tom was not imaginative, and only saw what was straight in front of his nose.

There was a great deal of bitter mixed with Agnes' apparent sweetness. If her brow was smother, her smile more frequent than formerly, she felt more bitter and less kind to the world at large. Those on whom she dared vent her ill-humour had anything but a pleasant time. Madge was her favourite victim, but her mother and the servants were not unfrequently made uncomfortable and irritated by her. And yet she always took her stand on a pedestal and looked down in judgment—she was always in the right and everybody else in the wrong. When she visited the sick and poor,

she seemed to take a pleasure in alarming them as to their state, and pointing out how they deserved their afflictions, and might in justice look for greater ones; she terrified her classes with the awful punishments in store for trivial peccadilloes, and enlarged on the fearful suddenness and swiftness of the downward descent from the first trifling slip. These cruelties seemed to soothe her, though she would not have acknowledged to herself on any account that she was gratifying her spleen by hurting and frightening others—on the contrary, she was fulfilling a sacred and, she tried to think, painful duty.

Madge used to rush to June furious and maddened by the innumerable stabs from her sister's angelic tongue; and June sympathised with her, and derived whilst she administered consolation from giving her opinion about Agnes.

"I don't mean to stand it any longer," Madge declared one day, being exceedingly ruffled. "I have just told her what I think about her, and I fancy she will let me alone for a day or two, at all events. If not, I shall return to the attack."

"What did you say?" asked June, with an interested air.

"I told her it was no use her pretending to be

better than other people, and always accusing them of every sort of wickedness, when she was doing ten times worse than all of them put together: being in love with a married man, and trying to make up to him."

"Oh, Madge!" cried June, rather shocked. "And—and what did she say?"

"She turned positively green, my angel, and looked so diabolical that I felt rather frightened; only, thanks be praised, I didn't show it. She began to ask me how I dared——, but I stopped her quite coolly by telling her that I often watched her way-laying Tom, and that she had tried to set him against you (only that it was quite beyond her), by pretending you were not fond of the baby. And then, my darling June, as I thought she was going to have a fit, and as I did not wish to be there to render any assistance, I fled and gat me out. She has not reverted to the subject, but when she gets a chance she will let me have it, no doubt. But whenever she begins to be nasty I shall bring Tom on the *tapis*."

"But," cried June, "I would not have her think for all the world that I was jealous of her."

"Jealous! *Jealous of her!*" uttered Madge with supreme contempt. "No, my love, I don't think

anyone would accuse you of being likely to arrive at that pitch of imbecility. But she might make mischief. Of course Tom thinks you perfect, and so you are, at least as perfect as any woman can be to be nice, but she has that disgusting way of making everyone look to a disadvantage, and she works on Tom's ridiculous idea that every woman ought to wear her knees out on the floor in adoration of her children, and have her hair torn out in handfuls and her lace crumpled and stickied for their amusement."

"Madge," said June, a troubled look coming into her face, "do you know I sometimes think I am not such a devoted mother as I ought to be. One hears and reads so much about women being utterly wrapped up in their children, and sacrificing everything for them. I am very fond of my boy, he is a darling, and I love to have him with me, but," with rather an awed tone and eyes dilating a little, "he is nothing to me in comparison with Tom. If I were asked which should be taken from me, I should not hesitate a second. I should say take a dozen children, but leave me the man I love."

"So should I," answered Madge, stoutly. "I don't know what maternal instinct may be provided

with your offspring, but I should have to change very considerable before a little inanimate squalling bundle, or even a child like little Tom, could divert my affection from a man I was fond of."

"Ah!" said June with a great sigh, "and you don't know how fond one gets of a man."

"No," returned Madge demurely, "of course not. But I hope to some day."

"Madge!" remarked June, after a moment's pause, "do you know my mind is very much exercised about you and Mr. Carslake!"

"Is it?" asked Madge. "Why?"

"Well," hesitated June, "he is charming, his manners are perfect, and I know he is kind. He would make an admirable husband, and I am sure he is devoted to you, but——"

"But?" observed Madge with slightly heightened colour—"but?"

"But I am afraid he is too old for you; you are eighteen and he is nearly forty."

"I don't like young men," returned Madge, "at least not for husbands. Their opinions are not sufficiently settled. Heavens! fancy marrying La-di-da, with every other woman in creation trying to wrest him from you!"

"But, my dear, all young men are not so handsome or such butterflies as Dallas!"

"I *won't* have a young man," said Madge with determination. Then going behind June and putting her arms round her to hide the rosy red of her cheeks, "If, my darling, Mr. Carslake asks me to marry him, I shall accept with joy, though I shall try not to let him see how delighted I am to jump down his throat. I am not like some people; when I have got a good thing I know it."

"Oh, indeed," returned June amused. "And pray do you think you will be as pleased when you have got it as some people who took longer to make up their minds?"

"More so," replied Madge, not to be outdone.

"And you don't think that, reversing the position, you will be inclined to find other men's society delightful after you marry Mr. Carslake."

"I have a faithful nature," replied Madge. "It has never been tried, but I feel the greatest confidence in it."

"Then, my dear," said June, kissing her cousin, "I shall do my utmost to promote the match."

"Don't do too much, my sweet love," rejoined Madge, returning the caress, "or he may be frightened

off. A man ought never to be sure what answer he is going to get, and I should like him to be diffident to begin with."

"Rely on my discretion!" smiled June.

"Don't say a word to Tom," said Madge. "But of course you have though. I wonder why a woman is bound to rush to her husband with every little trumpery story about her own and her friends' affairs. It's rather mean."

"Perhaps you'll know why some day," answered June. "I don't believe in a husband and wife being really fond of each other if they don't tell each other everything."

"Well, at all events then, beg Tom to be discreet and not to smile or look knowing, or try to pair us off as though the whole family were conspiring to catch him."

June promised accordingly.

A week later, Mr. Carslake and Dallas arrived. Mrs. Trevanion was to have come on the same day, but her son had caught a severe chill and had to be nursed at home.

"What will you do?" June said smiling to Dallas as they strolled in the garden before dinner. "Your dear Mrs. Trevanion not here, and no young lady for you to make love to!"

Dallas sighed.

"I am awfully sorry about Mrs. Trevanion. As for a young lady, you know there is only one in the world for me just now. But," turning his blue eyes on Lady Nevil with the instinctive desire to be agreeable to a pretty woman of which not the most hopeless love in the world could cure him, "I don't think I shall have much to complain of as long as I have you, and you are kind to me."

"I will be very kind to you," said June, giving him a most benevolent glance. "Try and think that I am Mrs. Trevanion, and confide in me a little. You will find me very sympathetic."

"I know I shall," Dallas answered; but he could not bring himself all at once to comply with her kind invitation, having a firmly rooted conviction that it was not the right thing to talk to a young and pretty woman about another member of her sex. He did, as a matter of fact, want rather badly to talk about himself, and had looked forward to pouring his confidences into the always ready and sympathising ears of Mrs. Trevanion, and he was not a little disappointed at that lady's absence. However, after a day or two he began to find his hostess a very passable substitute, and she was very charming on her own account. He had

no inclination to make love to anyone but his darling Jane — still he was able to find a certain amount of pleasure in June's company, and she certainly was a very pretty woman.

Three days went by—three pleasant summer days, with blue skies, and a hot sun tempered by delicious breezes. Mr. Carslake, Dallas, June and Madge made a very happy quartette. They rode and drove, played lawn-tennis, strolled in the gardens, sat under big trees, went on the lakelet—always together and yet sufficiently apart to be able to carry on their conversations out of each other's immediate hearing. Tom was tremendously busy with various bucolic operations, and no smallest thought crossed his mind of there being any danger in leaving two such handsome young people together as his wife and Dallas. June was his—to his way of thinking, the marriage ceremony locked the doors of a woman's heart and gave the key over to her husband's keeping. There were only two sorts of women—the right sort and the wrong sort. June was the right sort, therefore, for her, there only existed one man in the world, and there was no earthly occasion for him to watch that no one else had designs on his property.

So far his confidence was perfectly justified. June loved her husband and was not likely to have

a thought about any other man, except, perhaps, that he was good to look at and good company, and Dallas was full of his unfortunate passion, and although never unappreciative of a pretty woman, had no thought or wish that might endanger his host's and cousin's peace of mind.

It was the third evening after Mr. Broke's arrival; the party was augmented to six, as Tom had begged that Agnes might be invited to dine. It looked so unkind, he said, always to leave her out. June had consented, apparently with cheerfulness, but with secret irritation. Agnes' society was always productive of something unpleasant. June had begun to find her very presence in the room irksome and almost intolerable; it gave her a distinctly unpleasant sensation to take her cousin's hand. She was not jealous of Agnes—most certainly not; but it did rather jar upon her to see Tom's excessive cordiality to a person he knew she disliked, and his manifest approval when Agnes was airing her sweetness and her pious maxims.

June was invariably seized with a desire, quite foreign from her nature, to contradict her cousin, but she was generally worsted because she was goaded into showing a little temper, whilst Agnes only became sweeter, more smiling, more serene,

Madge was wont to say that nothing short of beating or shaking her sister could relieve the irritation produced by that saint-like manner put on for the edification of strangers.

CHAPTER VII.

DINNER was over. June was about to rise from the table.

"Let us go with you, may we?" said Dallas, in a low voice. "We don't want to drink any more, and this night is too heavenly to be spent indoors. What do you say, Carslake?" to that gentleman, who was sitting on Lady Nevil's other side.

"By all means," he rejoined promptly.

But Tom declared it was a shame to leave his best claret.

"Oh, my dear," said June, "let us drink the lovely air instead! It is getting so hot here."

Tom and Agnes remained sitting; the other four had risen.

"I will stay with you, Tom," said Agnes. "May I, June? I have several things to say to him, and then we can go and look at darling boy."

June was sensible of that irritation which her cousin invariably produced in her. She had remarked how Agnes had been straining every nerve to amuse and interest Tom during dinner. The

embryo saint had even given herself little coquettish airs, and Tom had laughed and talked more than usual, and seemed in the best of tempers and spirits.

"By all means stay and talk to Tom," returned June, with a very perceptible change of tone from that in which she had just been speaking. "But please," with decision, "do not go up to the nursery. I particularly dislike having Tom disturbed in his sleep."

"Why, Juny," cried her husband, "you go up every night of your life yourself, and the boy sleeps like a top—nothing ever wakes him."

June would have reiterated her prohibition, but, not wanting to be made to look unamiable before her other guests, she turned and went out of the door which Dallas was holding open.

"I'll go and change my coat and be with you in a second," he said, darting off upstairs, and June walked slowly out into the garden, followed by Madge and Mr. Carslake. As soon as Dallas joined her, the other pair went off towards the avenue and Dallas and Lady Nevil took their way to the water.

"Your cousin seems tremendously devoted to the two Toms," said Dallas gaily; "isn't it rather indiscreet of you to connive at their flirtation?" Then,

as June made no answer, he turned quickly and looked at her.

She was rather pale—her lips were working nervously.

“I haven’t said anything to vex you? What an ass I am!” uttered Dallas, in a low, concerned voice. “I was only jesting.”

“I know,” answered June, trying to smile. “I am ashamed of myself. Pray don’t think I’m jealous,” with some scorn, “but that woman always irritates me. She does it on purpose—it is very silly of me to be annoyed by her, but somehow I cannot help it.”

“I never liked that lady myself, I must confess,” said Dallas. “She seems to have some little game of her own. But I don’t suppose she is quite silly enough to think she will cut you out with Tom.”

“I don’t know what she thinks,” answered Lady Nevil, still with suppressed irritation. “Do not let us talk of her!”

“Certainly we won’t,” said Dallas. “Give me your hand to show you are not angry with me!” and June gave it smilingly, and Dallas pressed it gently and her irritation subsided.

“Let us go in the boat, shall we?” he suggested. She acquiesced readily. The moon was coming out and both thought, as Dallas pulled lazily at the

sculls, of the last time they were there together. The circumstances of both were changed since then. June was married to and devoted to the man who then inspired repugnance in her—she had a calm, pleasant, friendly sentiment for Dallas, removed as the spheres from what she had felt that summer night three years ago. Dallas was not without a sense of *bien-être*, but had a dim consciousness of something being wanting. He was at an age and of a disposition when a man, particularly an idle man, wants to be making love to a woman; he longs for the presence of the one he adores—if she is not there, he is able to console himself with any other of her sex who is sufficiently pretty and charitable to undertake the office of consoler.

As for June, she is also of an age and of a disposition to find being made love to the most agreeable thing in the world, but her education, her ideas, her native modesty make it impossible for her to accept any substitute for the man whom she legitimately loves, and to whom she is legitimately bound. On this lovely summer night, when her heart slumbers so lightly that a tone could wake it, she would, how thankfully, exchange this gallant and handsome young Guardsman for her own dear, prosaic Tom. If Tom would only sit at her feet, look into her eyes, press her hand and tell her, in

language, homely perhaps, but eloquent enough to her, that he adored her, she would be immensely happy—she would not miss or regret the grace, good-looks, the fluency of her present companion one whit, or institute any comparison between the pair in the smallest degree unfavourable to Tom. She thought of her husband and Agnes' *tête-à-tête*, and again that vexed feeling oppressed her heart and spoiled the charm of the evening; of the sweet scent distilling from a thousand flowers, the rhythmic movement of the oars, the bright, pleasant face turned towards her. She made an immense effort and banished the hateful picture from her imagination.

"What a night!" she said, forcing a cheery tone. "I wonder," smiling, "what has become of those young lovers."

"It is going to be a match, is it not?" asked Dallas. "Well, he is a thorough good chap, but I should have fancied him a little bit too old and serious for Miss Madge, but one can see that she does not think so."

"How I wish," said June, drawing her slim fingers through the water, "that Lady Jane was here. Then you would be happy too."

"I am very happy," he answered, with a long sigh which a little belied his words. "I wonder,"

pausing to rest on his oars, and looking very earnestly at June, "if it will ever come right?"

"I hope so," June uttered kindly.

Dallas bent still nearer June, and gazed at her even more intently.

"Do you really think," he said, "that marriage is a good thing?"

"A very good thing," she answered smiling.

"One thinks," said Dallas, "when one is awfully in love, that the greatest bliss on earth would be to be always with the woman one loves. But one sees love marriages turn out rather badly; people seem to get tired of each other."

"It is the man's fault," said June. "It is he who gets tired, tired at least of making love to his wife, and then she feels disappointed."

Then her ladyship blushes crimson at having said, on the spur of the moment, so much more than she intended to say. But Dallas does not give any symptom of thinking that she is speaking of herself, but appears engrossed with ideas on his own account.

"Perhaps," he observes reflectively, "a man is so much in the habit of changing his loves; sees so many different women; whereas a woman, a girl, if she is of the right sort, sticks to one man."

"It is a very bad thing," said Lady Nevil, with

extreme gravity, "to get into the way of making love to every woman you meet; it lowers your moral tone, spoils your character, and makes it impossible for you to be faithful."

"But," said Dallas, "what is one to do? Most likely a man can't marry the first woman he falls in love with—very lucky too for him generally—and is he to go on being faithful to her memory? And then," a little smile curling his lip under his fair moustache, "there are so many charming ladies going about the world, one would have to be made of marble not to fall in love with them. Do you remember," resting on his oars and looking at June, "this time three years ago. I was most awfully in love with you. I was miserable for a long time afterwards."

June smiled; the time is past and gone when the memory of Dallas' short love-making and sudden flight could wound her *amour-propre*; she has even got over the dreadful humiliation of having been kissed by him.

"Were you *awfully* in love?" she asked archly. "Yet you went away and made no sign. By the way," as if stimulated by sudden curiosity, "why did you not wish me good-bye or send me a message before you left? it was not at all civil of you."

"Don't you know," said Dallas, with some eagerness. "Did Tom not tell you? It was he who sent me off and made me promise not to see or speak to you again. And—" here Dallas was about to reveal how Mrs. Trevanion had dissuaded him from writing to her, when it occurred to him that Lady Nevil, however much she liked the other lady, would not care to have been discussed by her and himself, and paused abruptly. "It was rather a shame of you," he went on, changing his sentence, "to let me think you did not care for Tom."

June leaned back against the cushions and looked up at the dark blue sky.

"It was quite true," she said thoughtfully. "I did not love him then—I felt quite sure I never should, and yet," bringing her eyes slowly down again to the water, "a year later, I adored him, and have gone on adoring him ever since. I suppose," smiling a little, and letting her eyes meet those of Dallas, "a woman's heart is a very curious and complicated thing."

"Yes," he assented, with an appearance of the deepest interest. "Now what made you begin to change?"

June drew her smooth brows together in a little pucker.

"What made me begin to change?" she repeated thoughtfully. "I hardly know. I think it was Tom's goodness when," her voice faltering—"when my dear mother died."

"I have been told," said Dallas, "that kindness is not generally the way to a woman's heart. If one is too devoted, one stands rather a poor chance. And yet, if one is awfully fond of anyone, it is so hard to keep from showing it."

June, looking with an impartial and disinterested glance at the good-looking young face before her, thinks it would be strange perverseness in any woman (free and unfettered, *bien entendu*) to be unmoved by the devotion of its possessor. That, however, is not very likely to happen, and she bethinks her of reading him a little sermon for the ultimate benefit of one of her sisters.

"Do you ever think at all seriously about marriage?" she says, with pretty earnestness, as though she were immensely interested in his welfare. "You must make up your mind, when you marry, that you will not flirt with or think of any other woman, and, if you want to make your wife happy, you must not drop all those charming little attentions and ways that most probably won her heart to begin with. You don't know how disappointed a woman feels when a man seems to change and

grow cool, and when he leaves off showing that he is devoted to her, and looks a little bit bored when she gives evidence of her affection for him."

As she speaks, Dallas calls to mind how he has already known the sensation of being extremely bored by women to whom he had once been very devoted—how some of them had been so exacting that it was really a nuisance; he remembered, on one particular occasion, how he had been staying in a country house five days with a woman he had fancied amazingly at first, but who had quarrelled *à outrance* with him because on the Sunday afternoon he had a very interesting book which she would not let him read, and had provoked him into showing some temper by seizing and taking it away from him. A man wants a little distraction once now and then even from making love to a pretty woman. He thinks he should never tire of worshipping his darling Jane; but, if she insisted on his assuming an attitude of perpetual adoration, it might grow to be a trifle irksome. But an exacting woman would be infinitely better than a woman who would not let you make love to her when you wanted to.

"I don't feel," he said, with rather an anxious glance at June, "as though I could ever get tired of my darling. And she is such awfully good company."

"But," replied her ladyship, "one cannot keep on being good company when one is always with the same person. Occasional absences are necessary to pick up new ideas and get new subjects for conversation. Do you know, I really think married people see too much of each other. I think it would be an excellent plan if they were only to meet three days a week."

"Ah! but," said Dallas, "how would you know what they were up to the other four?"

"There is something in that," smiled June.

A moment's silence followed, broken by the sound of Tom's hearty laughter, with which Agnes' somewhat shrill treble mingled. Lady Nevil's thoughts were abruptly changed. Now she wanted to be on shore to interrupt that *tête-à-tête*. She hated nothing so much as to see Tom and Agnes together; it was a certainty that her cousin was infusing some poisonous drop into her husband's mind.

"Let us land!" she said to Dallas, but he had no desire to leave his charming hostess just as they were discussing such interesting subjects.

"Oh, not yet," he implored, "don't go in yet. Do you really want to?" and June, who always felt it difficult to oppose anyone who asked anything urgently of her, forced a smile and said,

"I will stay if you like. It is very pleasant here."

Two or three minutes later her mind was immensely relieved by hearing Madge's voice join Tom's, and, presently, she saw that young lady hanging on Tom's arm whilst Mr. Carslake and Agnes walked at some distance behind. The change of companionship had been brought about in this way. When Dallas and June betook themselves to the boat, Madge and Mr. Carslake had made their way to the avenue: the place *par excellence* at the Hall for lovers and love-making, the place to which in former days Tom had always tried to inveigle June as being private and cut off from the rest of the company.

Madge had talked away in her usual bright fashion, and her companion had listened to her with that sense of pleased amusement which he always felt at her quips and pranks. His own disposition was grave though the reverse of morbid, but he had a strong sense of humour and a keen sympathy with bright and happy young people. His greatest drawback to the enjoyment of their society was his extreme diffidence in himself; his fear lest he should be a kill-joy and spoil their fun. On Madge, however, he produced anything but this effect; his gravity, leavened as it was

with an evident appreciation of her sallies and high spirits, rather stimulated than sobered her love of fun.

They had begun by laughing, and were inclining to a more sentimental mood under the influence of moon-light and the charm of the evening, when Mr. Carslake, with the very best intentions, made a singularly unfortunate remark.

"What a very sweet woman that sister of yours is!"

It acted on Madge like a douche of iced water. The moment before she had been full of gaiety, slightly tempered by a most agreeable sentimentality, for she was undeniably in love with her companion; now she was *froissée*, piqued, annoyed, she felt quite angry indeed with her friend for not having more discernment.

She stopped short; the colour came to her face, and she said, with extreme decision,

"She is not at all a sweet woman, and I should not have thought you were the sort of man to be so easily taken in."

Mr. Carslake was astonished; he was rather shocked too, and he looked it.

"Oh, yes," exclaimed Madge, "you are horrified, I see. You think the mere fact of a person being one's sister ought to make one adore her, but I as-

sure you the theory won't hold water. You are much more apt to dislike people who belong to you than anyone else, because you are obliged to see so much of them and they have such immense opportunities of aggravating you."

The pair were standing face to face; Madge talking herself angry, Mr. Carslake preserving his scandalised expression.

"Pray why do you think she is a sweet woman?" asked the young lady, slightly raising her voice and looking at him with rather an aggressive flash in her eyes.

Mr. Carslake's face relaxed into a smile.

"Well, really," he remarked, "she seemed to me very sweet and kind, and anxious to please everyone. I caught some of her remarks to our host during dinner, and I confess they gave me the idea that she was a very charitable good person, and then I thought she behaved so nicely in offering to remain with him afterwards and to go and see the child upstairs."

"That shows then," retorted Madge, "how little anyone not behind the scenes is able to judge. She only stopped with Tom and talked about going up to see little Tom to aggravate June."

"Really?" with evident incredulity. "I thought

Lady Nevil seemed quite disposed for a *tête-à-tête* with Broke, and your sister good-naturedly offered to stay and amuse Sir Thomas."

"Oh!" exclaimed Madge, growing still angrier, "that is just the delightful way Agnes has of giving people wrong impressions. Do you suppose," with some vehemence, "that June cares two straws about Dallas? She is simply wrapped up in Tom and the child."

"I am sorry I have offended you by saying what I thought would naturally please a sister," remarked Mr. Carslake gravely.

"You have offended me very much," retorted Madge, with unwonted petulance. "I thought you had more discernment. All our lives Juny and I have suffered from Agnes' sweetness which had the delightful knack of making us look in the wrong. No doubt," a little quiver coming into her voice, "when you have seen a little more of her *sweetness*, you will come to the conclusion that I am not at all a nice person."

"That I shall not," he answered, and made as though he would take Madge's hand, but she eluded him.

"Come," she said, turning her back and marching on in front of him. "We will go and find the others, and you shall talk to Agnes whilst I take

Tom off. But if you think June is flirting with Dallas, you were never more mistaken in your life—he is only boring her to death about Lady Jane, and she is listening out of sheer good-nature.”

In spite of all her companion could say, Madge went off in pursuit of Tom. It was the first time she had shown temper before Mr. Carslake, and, strange to say, he did not think very much the worse of her in consequence, though he did think she was unjust to her sister, who he could not help believing, if there was anything at all in appearances, must be a very excellent, pious and amiable person. Perhaps from a sense of duty she tried to restrain Miss Madge's mad-cap ways, and the young lady resented it. He did not feel as if he should ever want to restrain them—in his eyes they were charming.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. CARSLAKE, in his enforced *tête-à-tête* with Agnes, did not see any reason to change his opinion about her sweetness and general excellence, but he found her company very much less amusing and agreeable than her sister's. Madge, determined to punish him, devoted herself to Tom, hanging affectionately upon his arm, and when June and Dallas landed, transferred her attentions to the Guardsman, and laid herself out for a flirtation with him, an arrangement with which he good-naturedly fell in at once. That Dallas would respond to the advances of a young and good-looking woman was as certain as that a dog will swim if you throw him into the water. Nothing would please Madge but that they must have a waltz, and, as June was agreeable and Dallas nothing loth, they adjourned to the hall and commenced their gyrations.

Agnes said sweetly how sorry she was that she could not play dance music; she could have played it as well as any other music, only she did not choose—but June and Madge both excelled in it,

and as neither Mr. Carslake nor Tom danced, the services of the "sweet" lady were not required. Madge was revenging herself on Mr. Carslake and enjoying the thought that she was piquing him whilst she was doing what she liked best in the world with the most able coadjutor; but, had she known the reflections she was inspiring in his breast, she would have stopped point-blank in her waltz, snubbed Dallas smartly, and returned humbly to the man whom she most sincerely loved.

Mr. Carslake admired her immensely, thought her, as everyone does the woman he loves, irresistible—more charming even than June, and as handsome as charming. He watched her in the arms of Dallas with no vindictive or bitter feeling; only with an intensely melancholy conviction that they were perfectly suited to each other, gay, young, handsome, naturally attracted. Madge had assumed a coquettish manner to pique Mr. Carslake, and Dallas looked and behaved as he invariably did under the circumstances, and as Tom had expressed it on the first occasion when he attempted to describe his cousin to June and Madge, "He looks at every pretty woman as if he loved her."

When Agnes insisted that it was time for them to depart, June declared that as it was such a lovely

night they would all walk to the Rectory and see her cousins safe home.

As Madge was donning her hat, June whispered to her,

"What makes you so perverse to-night, my dear? Have you quarrelled with Mr. Carslake?"

"No," answered Madge, "but he has put my back up about Agnes. He thinks her the sweetest, most delightful creature in the world, so he can have her if he likes. Let me take Dallas, Juny, and you walk with Tom. Don't let Agnes have him. And I am doing a good turn for you because C. thinks you and Dallas are flirting."

"Does he?" said June, rather amused. "Well, now he shall see me flirt with Tom."

So at the moment of starting, she put her hand affectionately through her husband's arm.

"What, husband and wife together!" uttered Agnes, in her *aigre-douce* voice. "We must separate them, must we not, Mr. Carslake?"

"You will have to do it by main force then," answered June, with a laugh which had a slightly defiant ring in it.

Tom was delighted. He never wanted better company than his wife's. Dallas and Madge lagged behind, an occasional peal of laughter reaching the ears of the party in front.

There were only two of the six who were not pleased and amused; Mr. Carslake and Agnes. The former had a melancholy conviction that he had been indulging in foolish, groundless hopes. Agnes wanted to be with Tom and hated to see him and June on such happy terms; moreover, Madge's conduct exasperated her. She longed to have her sister married and out of the way, and she was quick enough to see how Madge was spoiling her chance. She felt spiteful against Dallas whom she had always detested—probably because he had avoided her society.

Madge, as we know, was a very sharp and keensighted young lady in some things, but, like many clever people, she could manage her friends' affairs much better than her own. She thought by piquing Mr. Carslake, she would make him more in love with her and would, probably, hurry on his declaration. Instead of this, she was fostering his diffidence in himself; making him doubt that she had ever cared for him, and showing him that he was quite unsuited (grave and comparatively old as he was), to be the husband of a bright young creature like herself. She might have fancied she liked him a little; if she married him, she would find it intolerable to be tied to a man so much her senior, so unlike her in temperament—when she met gay, good-

looking, young fellows, like Broke, for instance, she would probably break her heart because they were beyond reach, or break his by bringing them within reach. No! that was why so many women went astray, because their youth and ardent dispositions were yoked to unsuitable mates. He felt that he should have to give up all thought of her, but that it would be a terrible wrench. He walked back to the Hall with Sir Thomas and Lady Nevil. Dallas and Madge were lost. He did not wait to wish her good night, nor did he go to the smoking-room, but straight to his own.

Madge, who meant to atone for her misconduct by behaving very prettily to him, was much disconcerted at not being given the opportunity. She felt rather crest-fallen, but worked herself into a fit of anger before she finally went to sleep, and resolved to punish him for being vexed although she had done her utmost to provoke him.

A picnic had been arranged for the following day: it was to be held in the same spot as the one recorded much earlier in this story; the picnic which as far as June was concerned had been such a dismal failure. Two girls from the neighbourhood and two soldiers from L., not the same ones who had assisted on the previous occasion (they having gone to picnic in other climes), were to swell the

Hall party. Tom could not possibly leave his harvesting operations, and Agnes had declined to join them, a circumstance for which June would have been devoutly thankful but for the uncomfortable suspicion that her cousin would find her way up to the Hall in quest of Tom senior under pretence of a visit to his son. However, she did not allow the thought to trouble her seriously.

It was as lovely a day as that former one, and the party was very cheery, to all appearance. Before starting, Lady Nevil had taken Madge aside and said to her,

"My dear child, do not carry this any further. I am sure it is not wise. Leave Dallas alone and keep with Mr. Carslake. He is not a man to be trifled with, I feel convinced."

But Madge tossed her head wilfully, saying,

"I mean to punish him. What business had he to go off last night without wishing me good night!"

"You would be very sorry if you lost him."

"I don't mean to lose him," answered Madge. "Now, Juny darling, you let me manage my lover my own way; you know I am rather successful in these little affairs," with an arch glance.

"One may sometimes be a trifle too clever," an-

swered June. "I daresay your system might answer with some men, but I doubt its success in the present case."

"We shall see," smiled Madge. "Besides, darling, I am not going to let anyone think that Dallas is making up to you."

"You are very kind," returned June. "But I fancy I can take care of myself."

"I don't know," returned Madge. "La-di-da is very seductive. I can't help rather feeling the influence of his fascinations myself."

Here their conversation was interrupted and five minutes later they were *en route*.

Madge, having arranged her plan of battle, proceeded to carry it out. Nothing would please her but that Dallas should be her squire, and she would not allow him to leave her side or to speak to anyone else.

Though it was against Mr. Broke's principles ever to repel the advances of a pretty woman, he yet, being actuated by gentlemanlike feelings, thought it not the proper thing to interfere with a friend in a genuine love affair, and though he did not at all object to the fact of being made a cat's-paw of by a lady who was willing to divert and be agreeable to him, he thought it very hard lines on Cars-

lake to be punished for an apparently imaginary offence.

Madge, whilst she flirted ostentatiously with the Guardsman, gave an occasional side-long glance at the real object of her affections, and was exhilarated by observing that she was making him unhappy. But already she was beginning to repent, for, true to her sex's nature, though she liked Dallas and he amused her, she could not bear to be in the company of the man she loved and not monopolise him. Had Mr. Carslake been able to adopt his lady-love's tactics, and to pretend to flirt with one of the other young ladies, he would have been instantaneously successful in turning the tables; but no such idea entered his brain. Indeed he was utterly incapable of the deceitful practices of love. He talked chiefly to June, who felt very sorry for him and very angry with her cousin: the two other ladies took possession of the soldiers and seemed satisfied on the whole, though one cast occasional glances of covert interest at Dallas, and of disapproval at his companion.

Luncheon over, Madge insisted on a stroll in the woods, which only meant that she took Dallas a little away from the rest of the party, and sat with him under a big tree whilst he smoked cigarettes, in which, for the sake of bravado and with a wicked

hope that Mr. Carslake might see her, she joined him. She was not altogether very happy, so she talked volubly and feigned higher spirits than usual.

"Do you remember the picnic here three years ago?" she asked, and Dallas looked into her eyes with that little unconscious way of his which had grown a habit, saying of course he did, as though to imply that he recollected it on the young lady's account.

"*How* you went on with that horrid little Mrs. Fetherston, and how Juny and I hated her! though now, I daresay, we should not be quite so shocked as we were then."

"Did you hate her?" said Dallas. "Why?"

"Because she flirted so outrageously with you."

"That was only her way. She is the best little lady in the world," returned Dallas, who had the merit of always standing up for his friends, and speaking of people as he found them. No one ever heard him sneer or laugh away a woman's reputation.

"I very much doubt her being 'the best little lady in the world,'" mocked Madge. "And she does not seem to wish to give people that impression."

"But," said Dallas, "there is nothing so common with you ladies as to try to pretend to be something you are not. Some of you pretend to be better than you are, but a good many want to be thought much worse."

"And pray," inquired Madge, looking full at her companion, "what do I pretend?"

"You?" returned Dallas, with a twinkle in his blue eyes—"you pretend to be a very cruel and heartless young lady, which I am quite sure you are not."

"I am anything but heartless," retorted Madge, feigning not to understand him. "When I marry I shall never look at another man."

"What! if he goes off for months, and leaves you as Fetherston does his wife?"

"I shouldn't let him go, or I should go with him," observed Madge drily. "I daresay, if she had taken half the pains to please him that she does to please other men, he would not have wanted to leave her."

"But some men don't care for the same place or the same company always. I know a man whose wife is a most charming lady, and he is always going off somewhere or other."

"Perhaps she is charming to you, but not to him," suggested Madge.

Dallas leaned on one arm and watched the smoke of his cigarette. He was not given to arguing.

"Did you think," he inquired, after a slight pause—"did you think three years ago that your cousin would have married Tom?"

"Yes," replied Madge stoutly, "I was always quite sure of it. And, if he had not been so humble, she would have been fond of him long before. Now she perfectly worships him—indeed, if anything, she is the more devoted of the two."

"And what changed her?" asked Dallas; then colouring a little, "I mean, what made her so much more fond of him than she seemed to be the time of that last picnic?"

"He was so awfully good to her when poor darling auntie died; and then—well, I had something to do with it."

"Had you? What, if it's not impertinent?"

"I made him pretend he was going away; and then she came round."

"Oh!" remarked Dallas, with a long look at Madge. "But you were a very young lady then."

"I had eyes in my head, though," returned Madge complacently. "And I had remarked that one must be master, and that it is always the one who can pretend to be the most determined."

"Must there always be pretence in love?" asked Dallas amused.

"Always," Madge answered resolutely.

"And so," he said, still keeping his laughing eyes fixed on her, "you are pretending to flirt with me in order to punish Carslake?"

Madge blushed rosy red.

"What is Mr. Carslake to me?" she said.

"He is a thundering good chap, and he is quite devoted to you," returned Dallas.

"What nonsense!" and Madge began to tear up the moss beside her. "He is not devoted to anyone. I think he has fallen in love with Agnes. It's a pity she isn't here to-day."

"With your sister?"

"Yes. He thinks her such a *very sweet person*," with rising ire.

"Probably he thought to please you by saying so."

"Then he made a very great mistake."

"Well," laughed Dallas, "there is no fear of my offending you in the same way. I have no doubt she is a very good and excellent lady, but she certainly does not fetch me."

"Here you are!" cried Lady Nevil's voice gaily at this moment, as she appeared close at hand with Mr. Carslake. "Come with us for a stroll."

Her ladyship tried to manœuvre to leave Madge and her lover together and Dallas was fain to second her, but Madge was wilful and linked her arm in June's, and Mr. Carslake made no effort to overcome her perversity.

Madge would have been a good deal puzzled to account, even to herself, for her behaviour—she had, however, a secret impression that she was strengthening her hold on Mr. Carslake by causing him these pangs, and she had the most perfect conviction that the moment she chose to hold out the olive branch again, he would rush forward to take it. She was not warned by his gravity or the increased quietness of his manner, and her appetite for cruelty grew by its indulgence.

He, for his part, was suffering exceedingly—far more than his tormentor dreamed of. He had begun to indulge hopes that were very sweet to him. After fancying his own time for feeling and inspiring love gone by, to find himself passionately attached to a bright, charming young girl, who gave him reason to think that she was by no means indifferent to him, had been like an unexpected glimpse of gardens and fountains in the midst of a desert. Like these it had proved to be a mirage, and the disappointment was bitter. He did not blame her—she had been amusing herself from that

thirst for excitement and admiration which is so strong in the young. But he could not bear to be any longer in her presence or to watch her with Dallas. He believed her to be in love with the Guardsman. What more natural! He had everything in his favour, and was sure to act like a fire-brand on the susceptible heart of a young girl; what chance had he against him?

Before the picnic party started for home, Madge had partially come to her senses, and, if Mr. Carslake had made the smallest overture to her, would have kindly consented to forgive and restore him to favour. But he made no such overture, and again the young lady's ire was kindled. They had to pass the Rectory on the way back, and Madge insisted on wishing them good-bye and going home. June, being exceedingly vexed with her, did not press her very eagerly to return to the Hall.

Mr. Carslake uttered not a word. Dallas was the only one who made any effort to shake her resolve.

The wilful young lady passed a very unpleasant evening and night with her own reflections. She had overacted her part; had vexed and hurt the kindest, dearest, best man that ever lived; she would like to throw herself at his feet and beg his forgiveness; she began to despise her own clever-

ness and felt quite spiteful against Dallas for having lent himself to be her tool. Never mind! all should be changed on the morrow. She would make the handsomest of *amendes*, and would never, never behave so badly again.

The next morning her eyes unclosed on a tear-stained landscape; the rain was coming down in torrents. She intended to have gone up to the Hall the instant after breakfast, but the weather made it impossible. At twelve o'clock there was a slight cessation of the downpour, and she made a valiant start. Down came the rain again, but, nothing daunted, she pursued her way and arrived dripping with wet at her destination. June met her in the hall and beckoned her into Tom's room.

"Now," said her ladyship, with quite unaccustomed severity, "I hope you are happy."

"I'm not at all happy," answered Madge, rather flippantly. "I feel like a drowned rat."

"Mr. Carslake," proceeded June, too much displeased to offer, with her usual hospitality, to assist her cousin in her uncomfortable plight—"Mr. Carslake left twenty minutes ago. And it is quite certain that you will never see any more of him."

Madge turned ghastly white.

"Gone!" she stammered.

"Yes, gone. He made some bald pretext about

a letter he had received, but I have since ascertained that no letter came for him this morning."

Madge flung herself into a chair, and sobbed as if her heart would break. Her case was hopeless. He had not asked her to marry him, though she had felt certain he meant to; there had been no quarrel between them that would admit of her writing to explain or to ask for explanations. She felt that she had been too clever and had outwitted herself and broken her own heart.

CHAPTER IX.

THE year was waning, Christmas not a great way off.

Sir Thomas and Lady Nevil had spent two months at their northern place in entertaining a succession of shooting parties. June had enjoyed this immensely—she had, no doubt, a great love of pleasure and excitement. Being an admirable hostess and possessed of great natural tact, her parties were extremely pleasant; she was voted charming, and had the rare gift of making herself popular with both sexes. Her natural desire to please made her attractive to men, and, as she could be on the friendliest terms with them without flirting, in the sense in which flirtation is practised now-a-days, and did not want to take away the lover or admirer of any of her friends, women had a very high opinion of her. Tom liked to see her admired, was amazingly proud of her, and devoid of the smallest particle of jealousy. The sport was excellent; he had no trouble in the house, and Tom, junior, was of the party, for Sir Thomas had no

scruple in taking the apple of his eye anywhere except to the accursed metropolis.

Never once during their two months' stay had there been a single break in the harmony between husband and wife; everything had worked smoothly; they were mutually pleased and happy; their guests thought them an exceptionally favoured couple. Tom was liberality itself; therefore the greatest curse of married people, wrangles over money matters, mutual accusations of meanness on the one hand and extravagance on the other, never afflicted them.

June had *carte-blanche*, and she used it with discretion, inclining to the side of liberality. There is nothing that, to use a current slang expression, "puts a woman off" so much as stinginess, unnecessary stinginess in a man, whether husband or lover. Men sometimes accuse women very unjustly of being mercenary and loving gifts. What the woman most often values is the compliment, the evidence of affection which a man's generosity expresses. Many a man has irretrievably damaged himself and his cause in the eyes of a woman he would have given half he possessed to win, by some small meanness of which he was hardly conscious himself, but which made her despise him beyond all measure of his offence.

Madge had been a guest the greater part of the time. She was not the same wilful, mirthful, mischievous creature that we have hitherto known her. No need to check the exuberance of her spirits now. She laughs and talks; outwardly she does not give any particular impression of wearing the willow, but, as a matter of fact, she is desperately unhappy. She hates herself; she girds at her own folly and presumption, and always winds up with floods of tears and a passionate mental invocation to the man she loves to come back to her, to try her, to test her devotion once again. No golden youth has any charms for her: one or two men who are very much taken with her have made strenuous efforts to get her into a mood serious enough to admit of their making love to her, but she scoffs at the very thought as though she were not suffering the keenest tortures that cruel passion can inflict.

June was surprised. Mr. Carslake was, in her eyes, a very gentlemanlike, nice man, but she could not see his claims to inspiring such an ardent attachment as her cousin's. Once she had mildly suggested this with the desire to soothe Madge, but the young lady turned sharply upon her and retorted,

"I don't suppose Tom is a sort of man people

would think calculated to inspire a romantic attachment, but you were dying of love for him once upon a time."

Three weeks before Christmas, Sir Thomas and Lady Nevil with their heir and suite left the north and returned to the Hall. Tom was rejoiced to get back to his beloved home. June was almost equally pleased and only one thought crept in to damp her enthusiasm. That was the thought of Agnes.

Several times during the homeward journey June had hoped she would be spared seeing Agnes on their arrival: it was with a feeling of unfeigned vexation that, as they drove up to the hall door, she saw her cousin on the step to meet them, arrayed in her sweetest smiles. Tom greeted her with amazing heartiness, and, to behold her reception of his son and heir, one might have imagined her a mother parted from her long-lost child. Tom insisted on her remaining to dinner, and she accepted this invitation without the smallest demur or any reference to June. Her ladyship's home-coming was completely spoiled; the shadow which had disappeared entirely from between her and her husband loomed ominously over them once more; she felt angry and impatient with him. There was nothing in the world that June hated so much as feel-

ing cross or appearing unsociable; it was her natural *métier* to be charming, it was the *métier* she loved. The very presence of Agnes in the room seemed to have the effect of freezing her best qualities. On the other hand, Tom was never more hearty or cheery than when in company with Agnes (of late years) and we are all apt to enjoy the society of those who show us off to advantage and make us pleased with ourselves. At dinner on the evening of their return, Tom was in the highest spirits. Agnes evinced considerably more than her wonted chastened gaiety, and it was only June who felt vexed, discontented, out of sorts. She could not be pleasant to her cousin, and she was angrily conscious that Agnes infinitely preferred her displeasure to seeing her in her usual mood.

At ten o'clock her ladyship hoped with some coldness that her cousin would excuse her, and Agnes jumped up exclaiming, with an air of regret,

"Is it really ten o'clock? How the evening has flown! I did not think it could be more than nine. Did you, Tom?"

"No," answered Sir Thomas heartily, only too anxious to make up for her ladyship's visible coldness. "Time flies, you know, Aggie, when it's spent pleasantly."

"It does indeed," responded Agnes. "I must go home. Of course, Tom, you are tired after your journey, and I must not be selfish enough to take you out to-night."

But Tom swore he was as fresh as a daisy, and that he should like nothing better than to stretch his legs a bit.

Then Agnes deposited a bird-like kiss on June's cheek, which made that fair lady grind her teeth with disgust and repugnance, and the pair set off gaily together.

Her ladyship's mind was made up. She would come to an understanding with Sir Thomas—the old state of things should *not* be revived—she would *not* be vexed and mortified in her own house. Agnes should *not* be free to come and go and take these liberties at her own sweet will. Tom might think her unkind, they might even have a few words over the matter, but June took it as a foregone conclusion that, when she was determined upon a subject, Tom's will was pretty sure to yield to hers. As long as it was not a question of taking little Tom to London! Of course she would not be able to make her husband understand that her cousin's object in all this show of affection, this demonstrativeness was to wound and annoy her. Tom was so

simple and straightforward, he could not possibly realise petty feminine motives; she would therefore tell him that, without inquiring into reasons, he must accept facts, and the chief one was that Agnes should not be always at the Hall, and that Tom was not to invite her without the sanction of the lady of the house. It was exceedingly inconsiderate of him to ask her to remain to-night, and it was great impertinence on her part to accept. But all through June's reflections and resolves there ran an under-current of dissatisfaction with herself—a consciousness that, though she was not really unjust or unamiable, she would seem so in the eyes of any impartial person—anyone who did not know Agnes or understand the meanness and baseness of her real motives. She and Madge knew Agnes, but no one else would give her credit for trying to undermine June's influence with her husband, and to be revenged for her disappointment about him.

Though June had pleaded fatigue, she did not go to bed, but, having had her hair brushed, dismissed her maid, and waited up to give Tom a lecture, and to acquaint him with her wishes for the future.

She made a charming picture sitting in the fire-light, wrapped in the prettiest of peignoirs, the thick

burnished plaits of her hair reposing in her lap, her pretty little slippered feet toasting before the fire. But she had long passed the period when it occurs to a wife to subjugate her lord by her appearance—a woman who has a natural desire to please is instinctively careful and nice in all her personal arrangements. And Tom was one of those men who never knew what his wife wore or how she looked, except, perhaps, on some special occasion, when his attention was particularly drawn to the matter. It was an accepted fact in his mind that she was a very pretty woman, and he did not concern himself about the degrees of her beauty at different times. There was therefore no coquettish instinct or intention in the manner in which June prepared to receive her lord, and, indeed, she was too vexed to be seductive, and was rather disposed to lay down the law.

Tom, though open as the day, had a certain capacity, a very sensible one, for reticence. If his wife did anything of which he did not quite approve, as long as it was only a small matter, he was content to hold his peace—it would not have occurred to him on his return from escorting Agnes home to reproach June for having been cold and ungracious to her cousin, although her manner had somewhat vexed him.

He came into the room in his usual cheery, rather boisterous manner.

"What, not in bed, little one?" he said. "I thought you were tired."

"No," returned June rather coldly, feeling even more displeased now her victim had arrived than before he came. "I wanted to speak to you."

"Speak away, my dear," said Tom, with stolid good humour, planting his broad back against the mantel-shelf and thereby damaging the lace and ribbon with which it was garnished. June of course remarked the havoc he was committing, but her soul was above trifles, and she was not of a querulous or nagging disposition.

"I want you please to understand, Tom," says her ladyship, with a little fluttering at her heart though her voice is firm, "that I do not mean to have Agnes living in the house and coming up here whenever she chooses as if the place belonged to her."

Sir Thomas's lips close to a firmer expression than is their wont.

"I think," pursues June, "it was rather inconsiderate of you to ask her to stay to-night, and, if she had had decent manners, she would not have accepted your invitation as I did not second it."

"It would have looked kinder if you had," answers Tom bluntly. "And I don't quite see that there is any necessity for ceremony between cousins."

"There is always a necessity *I* think," replies June, "for not behaving in other people's houses as if you were in your own."

"And what about Madge?" inquires Tom, with some warmth. "She comes and goes just as she likes, it seems to me, and you never talk of keeping her in her place."

"Madge is quite different," returns June.

"Different," retorts Tom, more warmly still, "because she is your friend and Aggie is mine."

Oh gall and wormwood! oh, injudicious Tom! this is adding fuel to the fire with a vengeance!

"Friend!" echoes June, her lips beginning to quiver and her eyes to blaze. "I don't think there is very much friendship about it. You know she was in love with you—for all I know she is in love with you still; and all this pretended affection for the boy is only assumed with the object of getting influence over you and setting you against me."

"For shame!" utters Tom. "I did not think *my wife* was capable of such paltry feeling. What has the poor girl done to you? If she *did* like me, is that a fault in your eyes? Do I begrudge anyone

liking you? Am I not proud and glad that everyone should admire and think much of you? And, because there is just one creature in the world who thinks something of me and shows some pleasure in my company, you turn round and are jealous and rude to her, and want to put her out of the house. Poor thing! What has she got in comparison with you? She doats on your child and she likes your husband, who is her own cousin, and that's a mortal offence! I thought you were a bit above the little spites and jealousies of most women."

Things are indeed taking an unexpected turn—her ladyship's pride is up in arms. Tears more of anger than grief start to her eyes.

"It shows what she is," she cries; "all the time we have been away we have been as happy as possible, and never had one word, and the instant, the very instant we set foot in this house again, she is the cause of our quarrelling."

"She!" echoes Tom, who is fairly roused by this time, "it is no doing of hers, poor girl! All she wants is to be kind and friendly. We have been away for months, and she comes up in the nicest way to welcome us back, and you are all but rude to her. No, put the saddle on the right horse—it is you who make the quarrel!"

June stiffens her back and speaks in freezing tones, as is her wont when very angry.

"Whether it is her fault or mine," she says, "I have resolved upon one thing. I will *not* be made miserable by her, and she shall *not* come here to sow dissension between us."

Only one instance is on record of Tom having put himself in a passion with his womankind. That, we may remember, was with his mother on June's account. June has never until this moment seen him in a passion—now she has that privilege. The colour flies to his face, he turns sharp round upon her and says,

"And I say she shall come when she likes. I am master in this house, and no member of my family shall be treated with rudeness and unkindness here."

And with that, as on the previous occasion, frightened at his own violence, he hurries from the room with the inevitable slam of the door that is absolutely indispensable to a person in a passion.

June is almost stunned. When she recovers from her stupefaction, she too becomes violently angry. He to talk to her like this, forsooth! She will never forgive him. She bolts the door against

the time when he shall return contrite and penitent. He may sue ever so humbly for pardon—she will not forgive him.

But he does not return! June weeps the night-watches through. What is going to become of their future? She makes passionate resolves. She will leave him—leave the Hall; there shall be no divided reign, either she or Agnes.

In the morning, calmer counsels prevail. She does not for one moment believe that Tom cares for Agnes; that Agnes has any real influence over Tom; but she sees that he is obstinate, and that there will be a struggle between them.

She is rather frightened at his having made no attempt at reconciliation—she is still more angry. They only meet at breakfast. Lady Nevil is too proud a woman to show feeling or temper before her servants; she pours out her husband's tea and behaves to him as usual so long as they are present; only one difference is noticeable. She does not look at him. It is a peculiarity of June, who is wont to look everyone straight in the face, that, the moment she is offended with a person, her eyes absolutely refuse to meet his.

She expects that as soon as they are alone Tom will make friendly overtures, but she will not be

appeased until he is reduced to submission, until she has punished him sufficiently for the wretchedness he has caused her.

But Sir Thomas eats his breakfast with unimpaired appetite (it takes a great deal to put a man off his food); reads his paper, and shows much the same spirit of displeasure and stiff-neckedness as her ladyship. When he has finished, he leaves the room without a word or a look in his wife's direction.

June goes away to her boudoir and sits there with her feet on the fender-stool, staring into the fire; her eyes full of tears, her heart full of bitterness. The first day of her home-coming. Instead of going all round the place with Tom, down to her mother's grave, round the farmyard to receive the joyous greetings of the dogs, the smile and goodwill of their dependents, she is sitting here in tears, miserable, feeling as though all pleasure were gone out of life; as though she would never be happy again. Men were all the same—wicked, deceitful, heartless tyrants; pretending to be fair-spoken and faithful for a time, but sure to show the cloven foot sooner or later. Of course Tom did not care for her or he would not have treated her so cruelly. She did not love him—she was not

quite sure she did not hate him. What a weary place the world was! how soon romance went out of it! How remarkably right were those people who took pessimist views of life, though once she had laughed them to scorn. As for Agnes, she would have liked her to be put in a pillory and whipped.

The enlightened reader will reflect that there is nothing of the heroine about June; that she has very naughty ideas on some subjects, and is very wayward and wilful. But, whether she pleases or shocks, her biographer has only one object in view—to present her as she really is, faults and all. The old-fashioned heroine who never did or thought anything wrong, but was full of beautiful sentiments and always ripe for martyrdom, is a sham which no longer interests. Let it be remembered that the people who can be charming, can on occasion be very much the reverse. June had been spoiled, and she therefore held it for granted that she was always to have everything her own way, and, when crossed, took it rather badly.

An hour later Madge came in and found her cousin in the same despondent attitude, and then June, being sorely in need of sympathy, laid her head on her cousin's shoulder and sobbed as if her heart would break. And Madge vowed to herself

that it should go hard with her if she did not put matters right between these two beloved people, and that, if possible, she would prevent Agnes from being a cause of dissension between them in the future.

CHAPTER X.

CHRISTMAS came and went: there were guests at the Hall, and the festive season was spent in a fitting manner. No actual reconciliation had taken place between Sir Thomas and Lady Nevil—both had found it convenient to let the cause of quarrel drop; neither had the smallest intention of owning himself in the wrong. But, like all quarrels not made up and cancelled, it left a smothered resentment behind. June thought Tom had behaved very badly to her, and Tom considered that June had acted in an unkind and ungenerous manner. Still, the disagreement and subsequent estrangement had been so unpleasant to both that they were equally anxious to avoid a recurrence of it. June endeavoured to be more civil to Agnes, and Tom took less notice of her in his wife's presence. *En revanche*, he went oftener to the Rectory, and, when he met Agnes out of doors, was kinder and more cordial to her than ever. Once her ladyship passed the pair in her pony-carriage. Tom was on horseback, Agnes had one hand on the horse's neck and was talking

in a very confidential manner to his rider. Both, as June thought, looked confused at seeing her. She felt bitter and angry, but refrained from making any allusion to the circumstance. It is a bad sign when a husband and wife, who have been in the habit of speaking without reserve to each other, begin to affect discreet silences. June's manner to her husband underwent a change; the affection and tenderness which had always characterised it were giving place to a studied but rather chilling politeness. Tom, though not sensitive, was aware of and resented the change. If she chose to be unjust, she must be. No husband in the world could do more for his wife or interfere less with her; if she insisted on taking wrong and perverse notions into her head, it was her own fault, and he must wait until she came to her senses again. It was right for a husband to be indulgent to his wife, but it was not right for him to be an abject tool in her hands, and to do what he thought unfair and wrong just for the sake of propitiating her. Meantime he devoted himself more than ever to his boy, and got ample consolation in the nursery for his disappointment elsewhere.

Agnes was perfectly aware of the estrangement she had caused at the Hall, and Madge's stinging sneers and sharp reproaches were by no means ne-

cessary to show her the mischief she was doing. She redoubled her attentions to Tom's heir; her manner to Tom was more angelic than before: her sweetness increased his admiration and respect for her tenfold. Once, after a smart encounter with Madge, she waylaid Tom in a quiet spot, and confided her grief to him. She told him of what she had been accused; she wept before him, not loudly or convulsively, but in a saintly and composed fashion. She set so little store by the world; she was absolutely indifferent to the exciting pleasures which June and Madge loved—she lived for duty. And the one joy of her life was her devotion to little Tom—she loved him more than anything in the world; his artless prattle was sweeter music in her ears than any other sound, and yet she was reproached and made to suffer for her best affections. Would Tom tell her the plain truth?—ought she to give up her one happiness? Why was June so prejudiced against her? What had she done to be treated with suspicion and unkindness? If she were cause of quarrel between him and his wife, she would rather go away or do anything, however painful; but to be misunderstood in this persistent manner made life unbearable.

Poor Tom was deeply moved. He was immensely indignant besides at this dear, good creature being

persecuted for what was her highest virtue and commendation in his eyes. He felt extremely inclined to go to her ladyship and reproach her in no measured terms for her unkindness; but calmer reflection made him feel that such a step would do ten times more harm than good, and set the Rectory and the Hall by the ears. So he comforted Agnes to the best of his ability, and behaved to June with a shortness which she at once took note of and comprehended. To Madge he assumed a manner that was little short of surly, and she, being deeply offended, espoused June's cause with more warmth than tact, and occasionally talked *at* Tom in a way that was the reverse of judicious. June saw this, but did not interfere—she rather liked having her battle fought for her.

About this time Mrs. Ellesmere sent a most pressing invitation to her daughter-in-law to spend a week or ten days at her house in London, and June accepted. She wanted a change—a little gaiety would do her good, and it would be pleasant to go to the play and do some shopping. And perhaps Tom would miss her and be very glad to get her back, and things would begin again on the old footing. All the same, when Sir Thomas fell in most heartily with the suggestion, her ladyship was not best pleased, and thought pettishly that he

seemed rather glad at the idea of getting rid of her. Before starting, she laid the most solemn charge on Madge to keep her eye on Agnes and not to let her be alone with Tom for a moment if she could possibly prevent it. And Madge promised with hearty good will, and was quite sure to be as good as her word.

"And now, dear child," said her ladyship at parting, "what am I to say to Mr. Carslake if I meet him?"

Madge buried her face in her cousin's shoulder.

"Oh, my darling Juny," she almost groaned, "if you will only bring him back to me, I will be your slave for the rest of my life."

So Lady Nevil promised to do her very best—anything in the world short of humiliating her cousin.

"I don't mind being humiliated," murmured Madge dolefully, "if you will *only* get him back."

As soon as June departed, Madge began her system of espionage over Agnes in a most cheerful and resolute spirit. When Agnes walked out, Madge insisted on accompanying her. Every morning at breakfast she would say, in the presence of her parents,

"What time are you going up to the Hall to-day,

Aggie? I *must* see that darling, and we might as well go together."

In vain Agnes tried to escape her sister—if they did not start together, Madge was sure to turn up somewhere on the road—once or twice when she had stolen out alone to meet Tom as if by accident, Madge had appeared and was not to be shaken off.

At last Agnes was driven to bay and taxed her sister with watching her. She was deadly white and could not speak for passion: though her voice was low, there was a venom in it which was more suggestive than violence.

"Yes," said Madge in answer, with perfect frankness. "I *am* watching you. I promised June I would, and I mean to. You shall not see Tom alone, if I can help it. Nobody else would believe what you are up to, but she and I know."

"It is your wicked, evil minds," hissed Agnes. "You suspect the innocent of the base things you are capable of yourselves."

"Oh, dear no, not at all," retorted Madge. "We are perfectly straightforward—we don't pretend to be angelic or religious; we love to laugh and have fun and be cheery, but we could neither of us, June nor I, do a mean trick or stab a person behind his back."

"How dare you talk to me in that way!" uttered Agnes, gray with passion. "I shall go to Papa and tell him of your wicked, lying accusations."

"Do!" said Madge defiantly. "I will stick to every word I have said, and Papa has lots of common sense. I shall have no difficulty in bringing him round to my way of thinking. Even if he does not see through you, he will be sure to say that, if you are the cause of any unpleasantness or estrangement between Tom and his wife, that it is your bounden duty as a Christian to avoid all appearance of offence."

Agnes felt herself worsted, and forbore to carry out her threat of appealing to the rector. But, whenever she should have a chance of confiding in Tom the persecution to which she was subject, she resolved to make the most of it.

Meantime June was enjoying her visit to London immensely. Confident in the skill and good-will of the lieutenant she had left behind her, she banished the unpleasant thought of Agnes and devoted herself entirely to the enjoyment of the moment. She and her mother-in-law were on the best and pleasantest terms. Mrs. Ellesmere liked and approved of her thoroughly and had been completely won over by the charming deference which the

reigning lady showed her when she was a guest at the Hall, and the manner in which she was always made to feel herself at home. Mrs. Ellesmere was a great admirer of good looks in both sexes, and June's beauty, her elegance, her refinement, the way in which she attracted people were very high recommendations to her favour. She was proud of Lady Nevil, and her ladyship thoroughly reciprocated her mother-in-law's good feeling.

Dallas was in town, and added not a little to the pleasure of the two ladies. He was always a welcome guest in his aunt's house, and, during Lady Nevil's stay, almost lived there. He took June walking and shopping—he escorted her and Mrs. Ellesmere to the play—if they dined at home, he invariably dined with them, giving up every other engagement on their account.

The great charm in Dallas was that, if he *had* been spoiled, he never gave those disagreeable evidences of it which some of our golden youths display. He was always cheery, his manner was always courteous; he never took liberties, or became familiar, or indulged in the chaff which is dear to youth when it becomes thoroughly at home in a house. He had a knack of seeing what a lady wanted; he never forgot to open a door; was always solicitous about the comfort of his fair friends, and

all in a natural, unostentatious way that was the most attractive part of his good manners. When they went out together, he took tremendous care of June; thought of everything she would be likely to want; was most anxious to discover her least wish. He kept her supplied with flowers, he heaped little attentions, such as all women love, upon her, he always seemed delighted to see and to be with her, as he really was, and of course—as Tom had once said of him—he looked at her as if he loved her.

June, in return, was charmed with him and thought him the pleasantest company in the world. She would think regretfully sometimes what a pity it was that Tom had not those delightful little ways, that perfect manner. It would be much wiser of husbands not to give up their lover-like attentions when they marry the lady of their choice.

Mrs. Ellesmere was in the habit of taking impromptu naps after dinner if no particular call was made upon her attention, and, when she lapsed into soft forgetfulness, Dallas and June used to retire into the shade of the back drawing-room, and sit chatting there over the fire in order not to disturb or be disturbed by their hostess.

At first June was wont to lead the conversation Lady Jane-wards; but Dallas had not so much to

say now on his once-favourite theme. He would sigh and look thoughtfully into the flames, and say it was an unfortunate business, but he supposed it was not to be and there was no good brooding over it. Fact was that for six months Dallas had not seen the lady of his love, and absence had exercised a chastening effect on his ardour; he no longer suffered any absolute pain from his hopeless passion. He asked June's advice and opinion.

Would it be a good thing for him to marry? Was he not, as a matter of fact, too young to be saddled with the cares of matrimony? If he could not make his income do for himself, was he justified in dragging a girl brought up in luxury into poverty and discomfort?

When Lady Nevil saw that she was not likely to hurt his feelings by telling him the truth, she spoke out with perfect frankness. Formerly, she told him, she would have advocated in the strongest way the marriage of two young people who loved each other, and would have banished prudence and worldly wisdom to the winds; but, from what little she had seen of society, marriages whose only dower to set up house-keeping upon was love, were failures. It was quite different in the country and with people who had no particular status in society; but, smiling, for a gay and admired young Guardsman, it would

be sheer madness. Dallas was very much inclined to agree with her. He hoped he should never be in love again; not in the way he had been with Lady Jane—the misery of it was too great—in fact, the whole thing was “not good enough.” And both these handsome young people sighed, and looking at each other with serious and melancholy eyes, avowed their opinion that love was a dreadful thing and caused more grief and anguish than joy. Then they grew more cheerful, advocated the cause of friendship which was wholly satisfactory and pleasant, and, recovering their spirits, chatted away in the happiest and most confidential manner. June was some years younger than Dallas, but she affected matronly airs towards him and treated him as though she were considerably his senior.

June enjoyed her visit to London immensely. The only shadow which crossed her pleasure was a slight feeling of vexation against her husband. She wrote to him every day and he dutifully replied, but his letters, instead of delighting, disappointed her. Men’s epistles are often disappointing. Even the men who can say the most delightful and flattering things *viva voce*, express them but indifferently, sometimes not at all, in writing. And women are exacting about having what they call *nice* letters, which being interpreted means that they want to be told

about fifty times over that they are adored and that life is intolerable without them.

Tom was helpless with his pen. Composition to him was labour and sorrow; spelling an accomplishment no more to be mastered than the piano. Some people were born spellers, he was not. He never thought of writing a letter without consulting June; indeed she generally performed the whole operation for him, and as she had not left behind drafts for his epistles to her, he blundered grievously over them. But June would have smiled with fond toleration over his lapses in grammar and spelling if his letters had only had the right ring; if he had said he missed her and wanted her back. Unfortunately for her ladyship's frame of mind, he never hinted anything of the sort; on the contrary, he impressed on her (worthy Tom! out of the kindness and unselfishness of his heart!) that she was on no account whatever to hurry back, but to stop and enjoy herself. Everything at home was going on swimmingly. The rest was always about little Tom, over whom he invariably waxed rapturous.

To give June her due, she was angry with herself for feeling vexed with Tom; she knew he would not voluntarily hurt her for the world. But unintentional hurts are sometimes the hardest to bear. A blankness came over her heart after she had read

one of these letters. She who was quite young, and, as her looking-glass and men told her, fair, had finished with the romantic and passionate side of life; she who felt the need of affection as keenly, more keenly than ever, was to have in the long future no other food for her heart than such lukewarm, prosaic show of feeling as Tom had taken to bestow upon her. The possibility of caring for or being cared for by any other man never so much as entered her brain; although she was witness of the flirtations of other married women, she did not put herself in the same category with them. They might give reasons or excuses to themselves; she had none. She had married the man of her choice, he was good and indulgent and gave her everything she could wish for from a material point of view, it would be a crime in her to entertain any feeling but one of simple friendship for any other man. And, up to the present moment, it was a crime to which she had not felt the smallest temptation.

During this visit she received a good deal of attention from Lady Dangerfield, whom she had only known slightly in the season. Indeed some degree of friendship sprang up between them, as no woman could make herself more agreeable when she chose than Lady Dangerfield, and June was exceedingly amenable to kindness.

They met at a luncheon party where Dallas was also a guest, and Lady Dangerfield at once proposed that they should do a dinner and play together, and this led to other meetings of a similar nature. Dallas was invariably one of the party. He was not a little puzzled, and confided his perplexity to his friend, Mrs. Trevanion.

"I can't make that lady out," he said. "For the last six months she has cut me dead, and now she's everything that's civil and delightful. What is she up to?"

Mrs. Trevanion smiled.

"I have my suspicions," she answered.

"What are they? Do tell me!" he cried eagerly.

Mrs. Trevanion paused and reflected.

"Do tell me. You're sure to be right; you always are," said Dallas coaxingly.

"I don't know that there is any harm in my telling you. When you left off your attentions to her ladyship, it was because you had fallen in love with Lady Jane."

"Yes?" inquiringly, "well?"

"Well, now that she sees you so much in the society of another fair lady, she may think that by assisting to bring you together she is revenging herself on Lady Jane."

"But," said Dallas quickly, "it is ridiculous. It is utterly different altogether. Lady Nevil is my cousin, she is the most charming lady in the world, but—"

"*But* of course," remarked Mrs. Trevanion, looking him steadily in the face, "as a man of honour and a gentleman, you have not the faintest idea of paying Lady Nevil anything more than cousinly attention."

"Most certainly not!" exclaimed Dallas, with unusual decision.

"But Lady Dangerfield is one of the numerous class of persons who judge others by themselves, and does not pause to inquire into shades or degrees of feeling."

"Oh, as for her—" said Dallas, with a gesture of contempt, and then stopped short.

"My dear boy," remarked his friend, after a slight pause, "it is as well sometimes to remember how other people are apt to think and judge—especially people who have a grudge against one."

"Why, surely you don't suppose—" began Dallas, with some warmth.

"No," interrupted Mrs. Trevanion laughing, and patting him on the arm. "I don't suppose anything. And don't let anyone else do so either."

Upon which Dallas looked thoughtful for a moment; but, as his companion began to speak of another subject, he took the hint and fell in with her humour.

CHAPTER XI.

LAST year, when June had such a terrible fright about little Tom, she had made up her mind to forego London seasons for the future—at all events, there was to be no question of taking a house. She might spend a week or two at a hotel, but that was all.

Time and circumstances, however, had altered her views, and though she never for a moment contemplated the idea of the boy setting foot in the metropolis, which Tom swore had all but proved fatal to him, she began to see that it was only right and proper that she should take her place in the fashionable world and enjoy its gaieties and pleasures whilst she still had youth, health, and a taste for them. Her mother-in-law had been the first to suggest this idea, and the only question was how it could be most comfortably and agreeably carried out. Not a word had as yet been hinted to Sir Thomas, but neither lady imagined for a moment that he would offer any serious opposition to their wishes, and they had already settled in their minds

some of the details. Of one thing they were tolerably certain—that Tom himself would not be induced to spend much time in London, and that it would devolve on Mrs. Ellesmere to be chief companion and chaperon to her daughter-in-law. Her own house was too small to admit of Lady Nevil being her guest for any length of time, and the two ladies thought it would be an excellent plan if Mrs. Ellesmere were to let it and take up her residence for the season with June. On her return home, June was to get her husband's consent, and Mrs. Ellesmere charged herself with the task of finding a suitable house and making general arrangements. June meant to coax Tom to come up every week for a day or two, and, for her part, she intended to spend every Friday till Monday at home in the society of her husband and son.

It is quite improbable that June would ever have dreamed of this plan unless her mother-in-law had proposed it, and urged various pleas to which it must be admitted she gave an unreluctant ear.

“My dear child,” argued Mrs. Ellesmere, “why should you, at your age and in your position, be buried alive in the country? You are made to shine in society, and I think Tom would wish you to do so. If not, he ought to. He always hated it himself. I never could induce him to stay in London

for any time, or to do as other men do; and, indeed, I must say he always looked, as I am sure he felt, like a fish out of water. The time to make one's connection in society is when one is young—you take your place then and keep it; whereas, if you come into it later in life, when you have lost most of your attractions, you must either push your way, which is repugnant to the feelings of any well-bred person, or remain comparatively outside. And besides, when you are young and pretty, and fond of amusement, why should you be debarred from the pleasures natural to your age? I might," added Mrs. Ellesmere, "have had a daughter-in-law to whom I should not have felt disposed to talk in this way—supposing, for instance, that she had been inclined to be fast or flighty; but with you, my dear child, it is quite a different thing. You have your own dignity and self-respect, which will prevent your giving the world anything to talk about. And then, as I shall be with you, Tom's absence will not be very much remarked, and anyone who sees or knows him will readily understand that his tastes lie entirely in the country."

When a person wishes to be convinced of a thing, the task of the persuader is always an easy one. Lady Nevil, therefore, being most decidedly inclined towards society and gaiety, was not ill-

pleased to hear from the lips of her husband's mother that she was doing her duty in responding to her inclination. An argument that might have been against it—her having to leave Tom behind in the country—was now in favour of it; for, if he were at home, she would not have the smallest anxiety as to the welfare of the boy. The only drawback she saw, and that was a serious one, was Agnes—Agnes uncontrolled at the Hall; for of course June would have Madge with her in London the greater part of the time—dear Madge—and she hoped earnestly to succeed in bringing back Mr. Carslake to the feet of his repentant love.

Lady Nevil was going back home in the best of spirits. She was looking forward immensely to seeing Tom and his heir; she was full of excellent resolutions—*almost* charitably inclined even to Agnes, and in excellent humour with herself and everyone else.

Dallas, of course, saw her off. There was a dreadfully crestfallen look on his comely young face. He had bought her every paper—literature enough for a journey to Scotland—he had brought with him a little cut crystal and silver flask, with her monogram engraved, as a parting gift; he had even thought to provide a rug, in case her own should not be warm enough.

"And I should have brought you some flowers," he said, "but I thought it would bore you to carry them, and, now you are going home, it would be like taking coals to Newcastle."

June thanked him very prettily—she was not one of the women who receive everything as though it were their due, and unworthy any gracious response.

"I shall miss you so awfully," he said as the train was about to start, holding her hand and looking more than ever as if he loved her, unconscious or unmindful of her maid in the opposite corner. "You'll ask me down at Easter, won't you?" in an imploring tone.

"Of course I will, and mind you come!"

"No fear!" murmured Dallas significantly; and then the train was off, and June felt for a moment that the loss of his society and his thoughtful attentions would certainly make itself felt for the next few days. But then her mind flew off to the Hall and her beloved ones there.

As the train drew up to the platform Tom's big form was distinctly visible, and in a moment he had kissed her heartily and was helping her out, for Tom had no idea that it was indiscreet or vulgar to salute his wife in public, and despised the unemotional creed of the Vere de Veres.

June was in the highest spirits as they drove to the Hall, but Tom, though evidently rejoiced to see her, was somewhat ill-at-ease, a fact which June's quick perceptions soon caused her to grasp.

She appeared, however, to be unconscious of it, resolved that nothing should break the harmony of this meeting, and, having been reassured as to Tom junior's perfect well-being, she forbade herself to be uneasy.

She had brought the boy some lovely toys and rushed up to the nursery with them. Just one qualm came over her as she turned the handle—would Agnes be there? No! only the nurse and little Tom, who uttered a yell of delight at sight of his lovely mother.

Half an hour later, when she went into her boudoir, June found a note in Madge's handwriting lying on the table. She had rather expected that her cousin would be up at the Hall waiting to receive her. When she had read the letter, the liveliest emotion was depicted on her countenance. It was rather fortunate that Tom had gone off to his room to see a man on business. Madge's epistle was almost incoherent from indignation. Tom had grossly insulted her that morning; had called her a spy and a mischief-maker, and finally had forbidden her the house.

June was still in her travelling attire; it was scarcely dark. A moment later she was on her way to the Rectory, leaving word that one of the footmen was to come there in half an hour to see her home.

She found Madge alone in what used to be the school-room; the rest of the family were out. Madge, her eyes inflamed with crying, threw herself on her cousin's neck and began to sob violently. June was scarcely less moved.

"To think," gasped Madge, "that Tom, whom I was always so fond of, should behave so to me! I will never speak to him again, never, never! And oh, Juny! I wouldn't mind a bit about not going to the Hall if it wasn't for you. But what shall I do without you!"

"Nonsense, my dear," replied June superbly. "If Tom forbids you the house, he will have to turn me out too. We shall soon see about that. But you haven't told me yet what has happened."

"You know, darling," said Madge. "I promised you *faithfully* to watch Agnes and not to give her a chance of being alone with Tom. It was all for your sake, for if there's one thing I hate it is anything mean, only that to be even with *her*, one must stoop to the same sort of tricks."

"I know, dear, I know," and June squeezed her cousin's hand affectionately.

"Well, this morning she managed to steal off without my seeing her, but, the moment I missed her, I put on my hat and rushed off to the Hall. When I got to the drive, I saw her and Tom talking in a very earnest manner and standing still in the middle of the road. Just before I came up, Agnes left him and went towards the house and he came to meet me, looking very red and angry. And before I had time even to say 'Good morning,' or anything, he flew at me.

"'Look here!' he said, 'I must have an end to this sort of thing. I'm not going to have spies set on me and tales fetched and carried to my wife!'

"I didn't want to quarrel with him," continued Madge, with a gasp, "so I only said, although I felt in a great rage,

"'I don't see why anyone should be afraid of spies unless they are doing something they know to be wrong.'

"And then he flew in a passion, and said the most dreadful things—declared that I had poisoned your mind, and that I was breaking my sister's heart, and persecuting the best and most angelic creature that ever drew breath, out of sheer spite and malice; and that, unless he took steps in time,

I should be the means of separating you and him, and that he forbade me to come up to the Hall any more, and that he would tell Papa and Mamma why he had done so."

And, with this, Madge was seized with a fresh access of grief.

June was almost stupified by this revelation. A chill passed through her heart. She had come home so full of pleasant anticipations, and here was Agnes interposing more seriously than ever between her and happiness. Here was fresh cause for estrangement between her and Tom, for never, *never* would she tamely submit to this conduct on his part—never would she allow her favourite cousin to be insulted or to suffer for her affection and championship.

"Oh," she uttered, with a little groan of exasperation. "What are we to do with that wretch?" And, at this juncture, "that wretch" opened the door and came in.

She gave a slight start on seeing Lady Nevil, but, recovering herself, advanced smiling with outstretched hand.

June drew herself up to her full height and put her hands behind her.

"I think," she said, with a slight vibration in her voice, which betrayed her excitement, "I think we had better understand each other."

"What do you mean?" asked Agnes, with an innocent air.

"I mean," answered June, "that I should prefer your throwing off the hypocritical mask of friendship, when you are doing everything in your power to destroy the happiness of my home."

Agnes turned very white, but still endeavoured to preserve her smile.

"You must be labouring under some mistake," she said.

"Not in the least," returned June, her passion growing. She did not raise her voice, but it trembled and vibrated more in her excitement. "You are trying to get influence over my husband and to use it against me, and I am now going to put a stop to it once for all."

"It is your suspicious and jealous mind, I think," returned Agnes loftily, perceiving that she could not hope to propitiate her cousin. "Tom is my cousin and I am very much attached to him, and, as you leave him and your *dear* child to go and enjoy yourself, it seems very little on your part to wish to debar him from sympathetic companionship."

We may imagine how this speech was calculated to allay her ladyship's irritation.

"Oh," said June, in the freezing tones she adopted when angered almost beyond endurance.

"Little as you may think it, I am going to adopt that course; and as you have persuaded Tom to forbid Madge the house, I now forbid it you."

"I shall not take your forbidding," hissed Agnes, turning ashen gray.

"Will you not?" said June, with lightning in her eyes. "I think you will."

"What shall you do?" sneered Agnes. "Order the servants to turn me out?"

"I think," replied Lady Nevil, "that, without having recourse to so extreme a measure, I shall be able to make your visit sufficiently unpleasant should you be tempted to favour me with one."

Tears of rage stood in Agnes' eyes.

"Ah!" she said venomously, "when you have succeeded in thoroughly alienating the kindest and best husband that ever breathed, you will be sorry."

"Perhaps," answered June, turning pale, "but in any case I will not have your assistance in the work of alienation."

Here the combatants were silenced by the entrance of a maid announcing that her ladyship's servant was waiting.

"Good-bye, dearest Madge," cried June, embracing her cousin with redoubled affection. "It will soon be all right. I will come down again to-morrow morning."

And she left the room without even a glance in the direction of Agnes.

All the way home her heart was throbbing and swelling with indignation against Tom and Agnes. All her affectionate feeling for Tom was scattered to the winds—she was deeply angered against him. Added to this, his resolute behaviour on a previous occasion had somewhat daunted her, and she was uncertain as to what result a very decided step on her own part might lead to. The first thing she wanted was to have Madge back at the Hall on the old footing, but she was aware that she had interposed a very serious difficulty in the way of such a result by her own behaviour to Agnes. Madge could not come to the house unless Tom invited her and expressed regret for what he had said, and, when he became aware of his wife's prohibition to Agnes, it was not likely that he would be induced to hold out the olive-branch to Madge.

She and Tom did not meet until the gong sounded for dinner. Tom was aware that his wife had been down to the Rectory, and felt dreadfully harassed and worried at the thought of the impending unpleasantness between them. For he knew enough of June's temper to be quite sure she would not submit to the events of the morning in a quiet and peaceful manner—there was bound to be a

storm. Why she should have taken this unfortunate and most unjust prejudice against Agnes, he could not conceive; but he was sure that, by yielding to it, he would be committing a very unjust action, and, besides, he had the obstinacy habitual to good-tempered persons, and was not inclined to give in even to save himself a great deal of pain and discomfort. He was devoted to his wife—he had been delighted at the thought of seeing her pretty face opposite him again at dinner, and here was everything spoiled by this confounded mischief-making little hussy Madge, coupled with June's own wrong-headedness. He was not in the least deceived by her ladyship's affable conversation during dinner—that was for the benefit of the servants—he knew so well that little company manner and what it portended when employed to him. She informed him of his mother's health; of the people she had seen; the places of amusement she had visited; she kept up a flow of conversation, but something in her eye said "by-and-by," and Tom felt ill at ease and miserable.

When, finally, they were left alone, there was a pause of at least a minute. It was coming now, and Tom knew that no human power could avert it.

"I have seen Madge," said her ladyship, looking over at Sir Thomas, and her beautiful eyes, in

which he had seen so many moods expressed, were lighted by an ominous flash.

Tom met her glance rather sadly, but was obliged to turn away from it and concentrate his attention on a walnut and the nut-crackers, with which he sought to occupy himself.

"And she tells me," pursued June, "that you have forbidden her the house."

Tom gave his walnut a sudden crack which reduced it to a jelly, and, throwing it aside, he took another.

"She forced me to it," he said slowly. "Her behaviour has been scandalous; no one could put up with it."

"Really," uttered June, a little red spot coming into either cheek and her eyes growing brighter. "How?"

"How?" here Sir Thomas raised his voice a little, "by always dodging and spying about in the most improper and impertinent manner."

"Is there any reason?" asked June, her voice growing colder as her temper waxed warmer, "why she should not come up here?"

"Not the least reason," answered Tom warmly, "if she came up in a straightforward manner and with some business to come about; but, when it was only to dog her sister's footsteps and play the spy,

I think it was high time for her to be told that she'd got the wrong person to deal with."

"Oh," uttered June. "And if she came by my wish?"

"Well then," said Tom, looking up and meeting her eyes with a steadiness equal to her own, "the sooner we come to an understanding the better. Perhaps you will tell me what you suspect me of, and why you think it necessary to set a spy upon me? God knows you must have changed, or there must be something very wrong with your own mind, before you can have come to stoop to such a thing."

CHAPTER XII.

JUNE'S coolness forsook her. She could hold her own perfectly with a person to whom she was indifferent; but the moment her affections were concerned she had to lay down her weapons, for, when tears will force their way to blazing eyes, they of necessity quench the flame. And June, when she quarrelled with anyone she loved, was bound to cry, whether she would or not. Her tears might be tears of anger, but they were tears all the same, the sure and infallible sign of weakness. Tears are like the blood which gushes from a wound in mortal combat and encourages the adversary.

"I do not suspect *you* of anything," she said, with a quiver in her voice, "but I know that hateful woman has got some dreadful influence over you, and is always plotting to cause unhappiness between us. Here I have been away and was coming back happy and delighted to see you, and I am made wretched the instant I set foot in the house, and all through her!"

"No, no," said Tom. "Be just! Put the saddle on the right horse. All through Madge. If she hadn't come sneaking and spying up here this morning she wouldn't have got my back up and made me say what I did, and which she most richly deserved. As for the other poor girl, no one was ever more mistaken in this world than you are about her. Why, she speaks of you in the kindest way."

Here her ladyship's tears suddenly dried up, and the fire flashed unimpaired again from her eyes.

"Thank you," she said, "I do not wish to know what she is good enough to say about me. I consider it excessively impertinent that she should presume to speak of me to you at all."

Tom sighed. He had a great opinion of his wife's cleverness, but he was forced to admit to himself that she was not always rational. He was, to tell the truth, not half so conscious of this deficiency on her part as she was herself. When a naturally sensible and just woman behaves with apparent injustice and irrationalness, she is pretty sure to be acutely aware of it, though the consciousness may not affect her conduct for the time being.

"However," proceeded her ladyship, with grow-

ing excitement, "we are quits. I have seen Agnes and told her what I think of her, and, if Madge is not to come here, neither shall she."

A flush of displeasure crossed Tom's face.

"And," proceeded June, working herself up more and more, and tears again rushing to her eyes, "now you have deprived me of my *only* friend here, and the *only* person I have to amuse me, I hope you will be happy."

At this last stab, given merely in naughtiness of temper, Tom rose, mightily grieved and wrathful. *He* never said anything he did not mean merely for the momentary pleasure of wounding, but, on the other hand, he rarely could be brought to retract anything he had once said.

June was capable of going on her knees and eating her own words five minutes after she had uttered them, as is the way very frequently with high-spirited and passionate people; but that was a way Tom did not understand. To stab and then to use the tenderest solicitude in binding up the wound was not a practice which commended itself to his reason.

"Then," he said, "if that is the case, God help your husband and child."

And, with that, he strode from the room leaving June with a sickening sense of general misery.

She locked herself in her boudoir and went through a dismal review of the past. Was this the same Tom who had once been her most humble and abject slave, in whose eyes she could do no wrong? who was ready to serve for her as Jacob had served for Rachel? A few years of marriage had changed him into a high-handed tyrant, and Agnes, the woman to whom he had formerly been utterly indifferent, had now more influence over him than she! And then the dreadful question forced itself upon her. What was to be the end of it? Was this deadly breach to grow wider and wider until all the happy past was slowly swallowed up in it, and, instead of devoted husband and wife, there only remained an estranged man and woman standing on either side the gulf with cold, indifferent eyes! Then June thought of the pleasant time she had spent lately, and of all the little gracious cares and attentions of which she had been the object. Dallas, with his winning manners, the soft expression of his eyes, came before her, and she wondered if he would grow rough and angry with a woman, or careless and indifferent if that woman happened to be his wife.

June was possessed of a lively imagination; she rehearsed to herself the probable comments in the servants' hall over her red eyes, her sitting in one

room and Tom in another when they ought naturally to be engrossed in each other's society after their separation.

June had some sound good sense when it was not obscured by temper, as the sky is blue though the clouds hide its colour. And presently she told herself that this state of things must be stopped, and stopped at once. She knew that the first overture would not come from her husband. He was not given to saying he was sorry, because he always considered himself in the right, and incapable of being unjust, as he understood injustice. June still hated Agnes—still felt indignant with Tom, but beyond all that she felt the absolute necessity for peace and happiness in her home. Strife would break her heart—would wear her out.

So, suddenly she rose, softly unlocked the door, and fled downstairs to Tom's room. He was sitting staring gloomily in the fire, absorbed, no doubt, in reflections as miserable as those in which she had been indulging upstairs, but he had a refuge and resource which she had not—his pipe.

June had not come to argue, to fight the quarrel over again, and possibly to make a worse ending than before; she had brought a flag of truce, and left all explanations for a future time. She sat herself down on his knee, took the pipe from his mouth,

put her pretty arms round his neck and her red lips to his, and said, with a faltering voice,

“My darling, don’t let us have any more misunderstandings!”

And, with that, Tom clasped her passionately to his heart, and a sob rose in his throat, and for the moment they forgot everything but that they loved each other.

When June paid her promised visit to Madge next day, she felt rather perturbed and uncomfortable in her mind. Madge would of course expect to hear that she had vanquished Tom in single combat, and had come to take her back in triumph to the Hall, from which yesterday she had been so ignominiously turned away. But June was painfully conscious that it was she who had been vanquished, for, fearful of any rupture of their new-born harmony, she had not mentioned the name of either cousin to Tom. She knew instinctively that he would not give in; if he made any *amende* to Madge, it would only be on condition of his wife doing the same to Agnes.

Her ladyship, therefore, was forced to answer Madge’s eager cross-questioning somewhat lamely and haltingly, and gradually there came into that shrewd young lady’s face an expression of profound disappointment.

"Then," she said, in a mortified tone, "you *did not* take my part, and you *have not* been even with Tom!"

"My dear child," replied June desperately, "if you are married to a man, it is impossible to live in a state of strife and quarrelling with him, unless you want to break your own heart. What is to be gained by my being on bad terms with Tom?"

"Well," replied Madge, "I don't understand it. I should have thought you, who are fifty times cleverer, and have fifty times more spirit than Tom, would have turned him round your finger. Why, any child could do it."

"Yes," uttered June, with a little groan, "anybody but his wife."

"Agnes must have got round him pretty well," remarked Madge. "Well, if you are going to give in like that, I don't know what's to become of you. Once Tom sees he's master, there will be no holding him, and he'll become a perfect tyrant. I wish to goodness I had never helped him to marry you."

June smiled. She did not take quite such a dismal view of things herself. Tom had been so fond, so eager to make up for their quarrel the night before—she might have asked anything of him except to apologise to Madge.

"It will come right in time," she said soothingly.

"And in the meantime I cannot go up to the Hall," pouted Madge. "And I had been looking forward so tremendously to your coming back. I think it's rather mean of you to throw me over for Tom. If you had been firm, he must have given in. Nonsense. Don't tell me! You not a match for Tom, indeed!"

"I cannot go on quarrelling," replied June. "It makes me utterly wretched. I believe I should give in to anything in time, rather than be on bad terms with a person I am fond of."

"It seems to me, my dear," observed Madge sententiously, "that you are preparing a nice rod for your own back."

Two days passed, and, though Sir Thomas and Lady Nevil were apparently on the best of terms, neither was really at ease. June missed Madge and wanted to have her back at the Hall, but was afraid to broach the subject, and Tom knew that she missed her cousin, and felt vexed about the misunderstanding, but was convinced that he would be doing wrong to Agnes and conniving at an injustice if Madge returned to her old relations at the house whilst Agnes was left out in the cold.

On the third day June, feeling the hopelessness

of the situation, said, in a matter-of-fact voice at luncheon, in the presence of the servants.

“Shall we ask them all at the Rectory to come up and dine to-morrow?”

And Tom responded most heartily, and with an enormous sense of relief,

“Ay, my dear, do.”

Her ladyship was the more disposed to make the concession in that her husband had met her wishes about taking a house in London in the kindest manner. That he did not like the idea was evident, but, so far from combating the proposal, he had given in to it at once, and agreed that his mother should take a house and make all necessary preparations. He would not give any promise about going up much himself, but if June came down every week he and the boy would manage to get along for the rest of the time.

Neither felt it to be a very satisfactory arrangement. Tom kept saying to himself that his wife was young and handsome, and it was natural she should like to be amused; of course the country was dull for a woman, but yet—but yet—it seemed to him that a woman's place, if she was the right sort of woman, as June undoubtedly was, was at home with her husband and child.

And June felt that a London season away from

her own immediate belongings did not present any very brilliant promise of pleasure—she would be rather in a false position without Tom. But, if she gave up going to London in the season, she must, as her mother-in-law urged, give up society altogether. And there was Madge whose heart was set on going, and whose future depended on her meeting Mr. Carslake again.

So, as Tom had shown himself ready to fall in with her views, she must be ready on her part to make a concession, though it was the very hardest she could be called upon to make—to invite Agnes after forbidding her the house. During her absence in London, Agnes would again have it all her own way, and Heaven knew how much more influence she would get over Tom in his wife's absence. This thought alone was enough to take nearly all the pleasure out of her contemplated stay in town. Lady Nevil wrote an affectionate note to Mrs. Bryan asking them all to dine the following evening. She thought it not improbable that her cousins would refuse to come. But both had reasons for not wishing the estrangement from the Hall to be prolonged, and were besides anxious that their parents should be kept in ignorance of the unpleasantness which had occurred. They, however, contributed to make the evening a thoroughly unpleasant one for their

host and hostess. Madge met Tom in the most supercilious manner, scarcely deigning to give him her finger-tips, and behaved afterwards as though he did not exist; neither speaking nor looking his way all the evening, but devoting herself to June. Agnes, on the contrary, redoubled her attentions to Tom, and hung on his every word with a pertinacious affection which nearly maddened June. Frequently, too, Agnes would smile at her with an expression of mingled sweetness and triumph, which her ladyship understood only too well.

June felt that this state of things could not go on for ever; her happiness, good feeling, and temper were being undermined by her saintly cousin. If the worst came to the worst, she would have to appeal to her uncle and aunt. But what could they do short of banishing Agnes from home? a step they were scarcely likely to see the necessity for. June had frantic ideas of persuading Tom to give up the Hall and go to live at their place in the north, but this had always been home to him and was in his eyes the dearest spot on earth.

The weeks passed. Easter was at hand, and June looked joyfully forward to having visitors in the house: Dallas amongst them. She felt his cheery face and voice would bring light and life to the Hall, which certainly was not very lively just at

present. Madge came up sometimes, but avoided Tom as much as possible, or, when she met him, treated him with ill-concealed hostility. Agnes came too, and invariably set every nerve in June's body tingling with irritation. And things were not quite the same between her and Tom as formerly—she missed, or fancied she missed, the old heartiness of affection; she was conscious that there was a growing coldness in herself to him, and, every time she saw Agnes, the remembrance rankled in her that she had been worsted in her trial of strength with that young lady, and that it was Tom's fault that she had been humiliated.

So she looked forward to her visitors' advent with a keen sense of coming relief.

A day or two before their expected advent, June had letters from two of the guests bidden, regretting that they were obliged to put off their visit, one from illness, the other on account of the death of a near relation. But her mother-in-law and Dallas were coming, and those were the pair by whose company she set the most store. She had invited Mr. Carslake, but was not surprised that he excused himself. Madge was desperately mortified and disappointed.

"What shall I do?" she said disconsolately. "I

must try to get up a flirtation with La-di-da. You don't want him, I suppose, do you, Juny?"

"I don't want to flirt with him," laughed June, "but I shall want to talk to him, so I cannot have you monopolising him altogether."

"I wonder," remarked Madge reflectively, "whether it would be a good thing for you to flirt with him just to make Tom a little, a very little bit jealous."

"Tom would never be jealous," answered June lightly.

"What business has he to feel so sure!" said Madge, rather indignantly. "He is not so very particularly attractive or fascinating himself."

For Tom was still deep in her black books.

"I think," replied June, "that he is sure of me more than of himself."

"Oh, well, I am sure of you too. I only meant you to make-believe a little."

June pondered over her cousin's remark. Would it be a good thing to let Tom feel that he ought to set a little more store by her: to let it dawn upon him that she might be attractive in the eyes of other men? But her good feeling at once negatived the idea. If he had unbounded confidence in her, that was the very greatest and best reason she could have for never letting him suspect

that it was possible to have misplaced it. And did she not love him with all her heart? she had no temptation to flirt with any other man. If only he had not so entirely dropped the lover-like ways of old!

And her ladyship sighed heavily. It was so pleasant to be made love to—when one was young, one felt the want of it. But you cannot give a man a hint to make love to you—even your own husband. To be worth anything, it must be spontaneous.

CHAPTER XIII.

MRS. ELLESMERE and Dallas arrived together just at the propitious moment—that is to say, three-quarters of an hour before dinner; in time to exchange greetings, to have five minutes' chat, and then to go off and dress for dinner.

When June had attended her mother-in-law to her room, which was the acme of comfort and elegance, warmed by the brightest of wood fires and adorned by choice flowers, she returned to the morning-room, where Dallas was evidently waiting for her. He came forward eagerly, took both her hands and looking at her with the most cordial admiration and affection said,

"How glad I am to see you again!"

"And I am delighted to see you," she returned, with equal cordiality, feeling that a delightful element of cheerfulness and pleasure had been suddenly infused into the Hall. "But I have been disappointed of a charming young lady whom I invited on purpose for you."

"Thank God!" returned Dallas devoutly. "I

don't like more than one charming lady at a time."

"I hope you won't be bored," said his hostess.

"What do you think?" he asked gaily, and, if one might judge from his countenance, it was evident that he did not anticipate such a fate.

The dinner was of the merriest. June was in the highest spirits—Dallas the same—Mrs. Ellesmere in her very best mood. The dinner was perfection, and conversation never flagged for a moment.

Tom's perceptions were not particularly quick, but they must have been slow indeed had he not observed the transformation in his wife. She had been so quiet lately, and dinner had been rather a solemn performance, not enlivened by any very brilliant conversation. But to-night her ladyship's charming face was dimpled by smiles, her eyes were full of light. He supposed she wore a different sort of gown, for she looked somehow even prettier and more elegant than usual. Dallas had the old manner which Tom had been wont half to admire, half to be amused at. His mother was a good talker, and the three seemed to have topics of interest and amusement which were Greek to Tom. The talk was chiefly of people, mutual friends, and it was

evident that they found it immensely engrossing and absorbing, and all took equal pleasure in it.

A consciousness spread over Tom that, after all, he was but a dull dog himself, and poor company for a brilliant young woman like June. No doubt her place was in society—how perfectly she and Dallas got on, and his mother too! It was certainly pleasant to look at and to listen to them, and how they seemed to enjoy it! Tom was too good-hearted and unselfish to be jealous or vexed at their pleasure, but it gave him a little touch of something that was not quite happiness to see that June could be so changed and bright from the mere presence of another man. But no doubt, he thought, as he looked at his cousin's good-looking face, radiant with smiles, and listened to his pleasant voice, that had an equally flattering and caressing accent when speaking to both ladies—no doubt he was the sort of chap to please women.

Tom was no kill-joy; he put on his most cheerful manner, and endeavoured to take part in the conversation, which he, however, felt would have flowed just as well and perhaps better without him. He was glad, he said in his honest heart, to see June so happy. Poor little girl! she had had but a dull time of it lately. No wonder she liked com-

pany and gaiety, when it made her so bright and full of spirits.

When the ladies retired, Sir Thomas furnished Dallas with a big cigar and some irreproachable claret, and his cousin talked to him in a cheery vein on a subject they had in common—sport. But, excellent as his cigar was, Dallas did not stop to finish it, and threw it away three parts smoked, which Tom took as a hint that he was anxious to return to the society of the ladies. So he betook himself to his den, saying he had a letter to write, and Dallas went off to the morning-room, which was always used when the party was small. Mrs. Ellesmere was dozing (every woman of a certain age should cultivate a talent for going to sleep after dinner—it makes her such a delightful third), and only just opened her eyes to smile at her nephew, then relapsed into gentle slumber.

Dallas drew a low chair close to June's.

"Well," she said softly, not to disturb her mother-in-law, "and how is Lady Jane?"

Dallas' face, which up to this moment had worn a radiant expression, grew grave at once.

"I suppose you haven't heard?" he replied interrogatively. And he heaved a sigh deep and long.

"No," said June, looking interested and anxious at once. "I have heard nothing."

"She is going to be married," uttered Dallas, looking away into the fire and drawing one of his thick gold rings up and down his finger in a somewhat agitated manner.

June's face assumed a troubled and clouded expression.

"Oh!" she said softly. "I *am* so sorry for you."

"I knew you would be," he answered, stretching out his hand and giving a little squeeze to her sympathetic fingers. "It has been an awful wrench."

"But whom is she going to marry?" asked June.

"Some cad with a lot of money. A cotton spinner's son. I remember the brute at Eton."

"How could she!" uttered June, looking at the well-bred face beside her and drawing a hideous picture in her lively imagination of his rival.

"Oh anything for money in these days, I suppose," remarked Dallas, with, for him, quite unwonted bitterness. "But I did think," his under-lip quivering, "that she would have stuck to me after all her promises."

"Perhaps it was her mother's doing," suggested June. "Lady Sweet-briar is a very worldly woman. Did Lady Jane write and tell you?" she asked, after a moment's pause.

"No. But her brother is an awfully good little chap and he wrote to me so that I might not hear it suddenly or see it first in the papers."

"I am so sorry," murmured June again.

"Well," said Dallas, with a short laugh that was not particularly mirthful, "now I have done with marrying. This has given me rather a sickener."

"I do not wonder," replied June. "But," looking at him with extreme earnestness, and speaking in quite a solemn voice, "do you really think you are fit to marry? even if everything in the way of money were smooth; do you feel that you could really remain true to one woman?"

"I could have done to her," he answered, with such an honest and sincere look in his blue eyes that it almost carried conviction to June's somewhat sceptical breast.

"Don't let us talk any more about her, if you don't mind," said Dallas. "I can't bear to think of it just yet." So her ladyship changed the subject, and, five minutes later, he was talking and laughing in an apparently heart-whole manner. Presently

Tom came in, and his mother woke up and suggested whist.

The table was set; June paired with Dallas, and they played not quite according to the strict rules of the game. When Mrs. Ellesmere chid them smilingly for talking, they exchanged much laughing conversation with their eyes. Sir Thomas derived a certain amount of benefit from his lady's increased cheerfulness: she was most charming and affectionate in her manner to him, and if she was mightily pleased, as no doubt she was, with his cousin's company, there was nothing on her part that could be construed into the smallest pretence of flirtation.

Tom was kind and cordial all round, and seemed glad that everyone should be pleased, and Dallas said to himself that his cousin was a real good sort and quite deserved his wonderful good fortune in having such a charming wife.

The two following days there were more guests at the Hall, for June took the opportunity of Mrs. Ellesmere's visit to give dinners to their county neighbours, and some who came from a distance stayed in the house. Dallas was invaluable in helping to entertain them, and Madge brought her services from the Rectory.

But Dallas confided to his hostess that he was

perfectly delighted when they were all gone, and expressed a hope, couched in deferential though emphatic terms, that she would never consider it necessary to ask anyone there for his benefit, as it only prevented his enjoying the society of the lady from whose presence he derived the most pleasure.

It was now the fourth day after his arrival. The omnibus had departed with the last batch of guests—the morning was wet, and they were wondering how they should amuse themselves when her ladyship had a happy inspiration. Battledore and shuttle-cock. These were found after a search—the battledores were dried by the hall fire; the shuttle-cocks had their feathers re-arranged; and Dallas and June began their game. Now, to thoroughly experienced players, there is not very much excitement in a game of battledore; the players stand still in the same place and the shuttle-cock takes its flight regularly and unbrokenly between them; but to beginners it involves a great deal of rushing and tearing about, violent dashes forwards and backwards, and is provocative of a great amount of laughter. At the moment when the game was at its height, and peals of mirth were issuing from the lips of Dallas and June, Agnes, arrayed in her water-proof, arrived at the hall door,

and the same instant Tom happened to issue from his den, and proceeded to let her in.

"Is that June's voice?" she asked, putting on the most surprised and shocked expression her puritanical face was capable of. "What *is* she doing?"

"She and Dal are playing battledore," answered Tom, and then, for the first time, the idea occurred to, or rather was forced upon, him by Agnes' face that their mirth was rather exuberant.

"Oh!" she uttered, putting a volume of expression into the word.

June had just sunk, breathless from laughing and running, into a chair, and Dallas leaned against the wall in much the same condition. Both their faces were becomingly flushed from excitement and exercise, and, to unjaundiced eyes, they would have seemed the picture of two handsome, happy, and innocently amused young people. But not to the envious eyes of Agnes, and she allowed them to express to June how very much scandalised she was by such levity. In a moment June read her cousin's face, and a thrill of anger and defiance shot through her breast, which the previous moment had been a harbour of peace and happiness.

"How do you do?" she said nodding, and mak-

ing battledore an excuse for not shaking hands. "I am quite exhausted. Would you like to have a turn with Tom?"

"No, thank you," replied Agnes frigidly. "I did not know it was a game grown-up people played."

"Did you not?" said June lightly. "Ah, that comes of living in the country. One sees and knows so little."

"Perhaps one is the better for that," returned Agnes, in her most schoolmistress-like manner.

"I doubt it," retorted June. "Now, Dal, I have recovered my breath. Shall we go on?"

It was the first time she had ever called him by his Christian name, and she would not have done it now but that Agnes had inspired her with a furious desire to do something that would give her cousin cause to be shocked.

"May I go and see darling boy?" said Agnes to Tom, with a glance of deepest commiseration, and he replied cheerily that he would go with her.

The game no longer had any charm for June; she felt as though the serpent had entered Paradise, and, after five minutes, she declared she was tired.

"I must go and write some letters," she said, and Dallas pleaded that he might be allowed to occupy himself in the same way in her company. So they betook themselves to her ladyship's boudoir, where she supplied him with the requisite materials, and then sat down to her writing-table. But their letters made very little progress, owing to their gregarious dispositions, and the innumerable interesting subjects of discourse that would crop up.

When the gong sounded for lunch and they adjourned to the dining-room, Agnes was there, having accepted Tom's invitation to remain.

June had the greatest difficulty in compelling herself to speak to her cousin, and there is no doubt that the temperature of her manner went down about fifty degrees every time she addressed her.

Tom, who never saw through Agnes' efforts to annoy June, but believed her to be genuinely hurt and shocked whenever she looked or seemed so, was indignant with his wife for what he considered her ungenerous and unkind behaviour, and responded with evident coldness to an affectionate remark which she made him across the table at luncheon. This incensed her, and from that moment she devoted herself to Dallas and Mrs. Ellesmere, and left the other pair to themselves.

For the first time there was a faint tinge of

coquetry in her manner to the young Guardsman; she burned to give Agnes a *raison d'être* for her looks of disapproval, and she was almost angry enough with Tom to feel inclined to punish him slightly as well. At the same time, she had a disagreeable consciousness that she was in reality playing into her cousin's hands.

Tom did not at all like the way in which his wife was behaving; he was not jealous, but he felt acutely that she was giving the maidenly and virtuous Agnes cause for regret and disapprobation, and he thought it an unamiable trait in anyone's character to give intentional offence.

It was still raining after lunch, but June declared she could not and would not remain indoors, but must go for a walk, and Dallas eagerly seconded the proposal. Mrs. Ellesmere said she was afraid to venture out, and would stay at home and write letters; so the pair sallied forth alone.

"We will go down and call for Madge; she will be delighted to go with us," June said.

"Don't you think two is better company than three?" suggested Dallas, but her ladyship laughed and declared they would exhaust all their conversation if they did not occasionally introduce a

new element. And besides it would be a charity to Madge.

So Madge was fetched, and the three had a most enjoyable walk and were all in the highest spirits.

"I can hardly believe in those two being sisters," remarked Dallas, when they had left Madge at home again.

"It is surprising," returned June. "I am glad," with energy, "that you do not like Agnes. Sometimes I am afraid it is wrong of me to be prejudiced against her, and it does me good to hear some-one else echo my sentiments."

"It is very seldom I downright dislike a lady," said Dallas; "but, upon my soul, I don't believe if there wasn't another in the world, I could take to this one."

"Perhaps it would be safer to say, as I read of a girl saying to a man," laughed June, "'I don't say I wouldn't have you *if* there wasn't another man in the world, but, whilst there is, I won't.'"

"Not under any circumstances!" declared Dallas, "She is the only woman that ever made my blood run cold."

Agnes' star was evidently not in the ascendant to-day, for, when Mrs. Ellesmere appeared at tea-time, she remarked,

"I am afraid I am late, but Agnes stayed so long and hindered me from writing my letters. I hope it is not unkind to say so, but I think she is one of the most irritating young women I ever met, with her sanctimonious ways."

Dallas looked at June with a wicked sparkle in his eyes, for Tom happened to be present, and June answered in kind. If she had been wise, she would have held her peace; but she could not help rushing to the fray, and exclaimed,

"She is odious—she throws cold water upon the most innocent amusements. Her greatest pleasure is in trying to make harm out of everything, and to point the moral to her own virtue and superiority."

"A most odious trait in anyone," agreed Mrs. Ellesmere, who was ignorant of Agnes being a bone of contention at the Hall.

A dark cloud settled upon Tom's face, and he said, in the obstinate tone which he only used when very much in earnest,

"She is a most excellent good girl, and does her duty as she sees it. If there were more people like her, it would be a good thing for the world."

Mrs. Ellesmere looked up in surprise and June flashed out,

"I am devoutly thankful there are not." And, feeling herself supported by her mother-in-law and Dallas, she added, most unwisely, in pretended jest that was remarkably like earnest, "It is a pity you did not discover her numerous virtues sooner."

"Perhaps it is," uttered Tom, who was very angry and in no humour for banter, and, with that, he went out leaving his tea unfinished.

Mrs. Ellesmere looked more surprised than ever; angry tears rushed into June's eyes, and Dallas said, rather injudiciously,

"Miss Agnes has one champion, at all events."

"I had no idea Tom thought so much of her," observed Mrs. Ellesmere.

"Oh," returned June bitterly, "he thinks everything she says and does right, and, in consequence, everything other people do and say wrong, as she intends him to."

"I should soon put her in her proper place," said Mrs. Ellesmere lightly, but June made no answer, and Dallas, seeing that she was vexed, hastened to divert the current of his aunt's thoughts.

Dallas had come for the inside of a week, and sorely sorry was his hostess to see him depart on the Saturday morning. It was like sunshine going

out of the house. He came to her boudoir to wish her good-bye and to make the graceful little speech of thanks for hospitality which he never omitted at parting from a hostess, and which, on this occasion, was thoroughly sincere and heart-felt.

"I am so dreadfully sorry to go," he said, "but you will soon be coming up now, and then we will have a real good time. I shall count the days till you come. And," laughing, "we shall not have Miss Agnes to spoil sport."

A slight pang shot through June's heart as she reflected how she would be leaving that firebrand behind her.

She went to the door to see her guest off, and returned to her room with a decided sinking at her heart, knowing that his bright face and voice would make themselves terribly missed. She had a headache and a slight cold; outside it was a gray day, with a bitter east wind—no temptation to go out. The afternoon was long and dull; her depression increased. She felt unwell; after all the laughter and mirth of the week, a reaction set in, as she was sitting alone in the morning-room, a feeling of such melancholy overcame her that she suddenly burst into a fit of crying. She was sitting forward in her chair, with her handkerchief pressed

to her eyes: the nature of her occupation was unmistakable. Agnes passed the window, and stopped for a moment to look in. As she reached the hall door, Tom was coming round from the stables.

"Oh, Tom," she said, with well-feigned anxiety, "there is nothing the matter with darling boy, is there?"

"No," he answered startled—"certainly not. But why?"

"Why, I just came round past the morning-room," returned Agnes innocently, "and I saw poor June crying so dreadfully that I thought—I was afraid——"

"June crying!" exclaimed Tom; and then he paused abruptly, as a most unpleasant thought smote him.

"I will look for Aunt Violet, or go into the nursery," proceeded Agnes unconsciously. "I dare-say June would not like me to disturb her just now."

"All right," said Tom, rather shortly, and he turned off to his own room.

Dinner that night was a very different sort of function from what it had been of late. A gloom seemed to have fallen on the party.

"How silent we all are!" observed Mrs. Ellesmere, as it was drawing to a close, "and how

dreadfully I miss that dear boy! Don't you, my dear?" to June.

"Yes," answered June, and at that moment she caught Tom's eye fixed on her in a manner she neither quite liked nor understood, and was deeply mortified to find herself growing crimson.

CHAPTER XIV.

LADY NEVIL had been in London three weeks: the season was in full swing. She had presented Madge to her Sovereign, and Madge was in high spirits and enjoying her gaieties immensely. June had been home once, and Sir Thomas had spent two nights in London, on the occasion of his wife's giving a dinner-party at which it was thought desirable he should preside as host.

Since no one is allowed to be perfectly happy in this world, June and Madge had each the accompanying thorn to their rose.

June, though she was spending a very pleasant time in London, felt it was not right that she should be in one place and her husband in another. Sometimes she had slight attacks of conscience. Was she right in leaving home and her nearest and dearest for the sake of amusement? In another mood she would say to herself that Tom was rather selfish to let her go into the world without him—that he ought to reflect that it was not right for a young woman to be deprived of her natural pro-

tector. His absence was undoubtedly a slight upon her, and would give people reason to think that he did not care very much about her.

Then his obstinacy on the score of his child was most provoking. The change for a few weeks would have done him good. Of course, after the fright his illness had given them last year, she never dreamt of suggesting his coming to London, although it had been clearly proved that his attack had not in the slightest way been connected with his visit to the metropolis. June was too sensible to attempt to beat her head against a wall; and, to talk to her husband of bringing little Tom to London would have been equivalent to committing that painful and futile folly.

Madge's impediment to perfect bliss was Mr. Carslake. She had met him more than once—he had even been present at Lady Nevil's dinner-party and had taken her in to dinner. But his behaviour had been so perfectly friendly and so entirely devoid of anything lover-like, that it was impossible for Madge to show any penitence for her former behaviour, and she almost doubted whether he had ever cared for her except in a friendly and platonic manner. She was puzzled and hurt. He was the only man, she felt assured, for whom she would ever care, the only man she ever had cared for, and

what should she do if he really had no intentions towards her!

June was most willing and anxious to help her cousin, but how was it to be done? If Mr. Carslake had no idea of marrying Madge, it would be humiliating her to hint to him that her affections were engaged; and, having narrowly scrutinised his behaviour to her cousin, Lady Nevil could find no reasonable ground for thinking that he was in love with her.

Dallas was constantly in Grosvenor Street, where Lady Nevil's party was established, and the most welcome guest in the world to certainly two out of the three ladies. And there was only one other man whom Madge preferred before him. Indeed many people were under the impression that Mr. Broke's chief attraction in Grosvenor Street was Madge. This was partly the doing (indirectly) of Mrs. Trevanion.

That lady had become extremely attached to June, of whom she saw a great deal. June entirely reciprocated the feeling. With Mrs. Trevanion, being fond of a person meant being thoroughly interested in his or her welfare and well-being morally and physically. She understood June's character, which had in it the contending elements of love of pleasure mixed with high principle and a strong

sense of self-respect. She knew enough of the world to see the particular pit-falls to which such a nature is liable, and, at a very early period of June's stay in London, she began to be aware that she and Dallas would not be the safest companions for each other. Given rather a dull and over-confident husband, irreproachable and excellent though he may be, and possessing, as his wife believes, her whole affection—remove him from the sphere of her everyday life, and place there instead a very handsome young man, with the most charming manners in the world and the most ardent desire to please her, and Mrs. Trevanion decided that, though no harm *might* come of it, a very severe strain would be put on the lady's sense of rectitude and mental fidelity to her husband.

There was something more to be said. Dallas was rather a prominent member of society; his loves were always very freely canvassed, and as, wrongly or rightly, he had the reputation of being an accomplished young Don Juan, it was never very good for a lady to have her name too much associated with his.

Mrs. Trevanion therefore took an early opportunity of giving her favourite a hint: indeed it was something more than a hint.

"My dear boy," she said, in the voice which he

was accustomed to when she was in earnest, "you are not to get Lady Nevil talked about!"

Dallas never fenced with Mrs. Trevanion, so he only looked at her with rather a shy and guilty expression, as was his way when she attacked him, and waited for her next remark.

"I am sure," she proceeded, being mollified by this behaviour on his part, "that you do not mean the least harm, and I have perfect confidence in her, but you know what the world is. I can see that you are getting fond of her, and, if you are not careful, you will probably be desperately in love with her in another fortnight."

Dallas looked rather miserable, and did not hasten to contradict his friend as she expected.

"She is the most charming woman in the world," he said, with a sigh. "Why wouldn't you let me be in love with her years ago when I wanted to?"

"If I had," replied Mrs. Trevanion, "the chances are that you would have given up being in love with her long before now. My dear boy, it is not your fault, but you are the most faithless creature in the world."

"That I am not!" cried Dallas indignantly. "Only something always comes in and interferes."

"Did you not tell me this time last year that if you lived to be a hundred, and no matter what hap-

pened, you could never care for any woman after Lady Jane?"

Dallas was silent and looked rather confounded.

"It is only the sentiment to which you are faithful," smiled Mrs. Trevanion. "You suffer from chronic heart-hunger. The passion is always there, but the object changes. Under these circumstances, I really don't see, my dear, why you should not regulate your loves more judiciously as it seems to me one woman would almost do as well for you as another."

Dallas looked deeply mortified.

"I did not think you could be so unkind," he said in a desperately hurt voice, and Mrs. Trevanion had to spend the next ten minutes in smoothing his ruffled plumes.

"But now," she resumed, when he was sufficiently appeased, "I know you too well to think you would like to injure a woman for whom you have a sincere regard. The world thinks of you as a butterfly without a shadow of morals or principle where women are concerned, but I know you very much better. If I did not, I should never have been so fond of you, because I could not care for either a man or woman in whom I did not recognise qualities which won my respect as well as my love. And when I put it frankly before you that in duty to

your own sense of honour and uprightness, as well as to Lady Nevil's welfare, you must not give the world occasion to talk about her, I know you will see that I am right, and that you will behave accordingly."

"But," said Dallas, looking at her as if she were his executioner, "do you mean to say I am not to go to the house or be seen with her?"

"Most certainly I do not. What you do and say *in* the house is comparatively unimportant as far as the world goes. Do not devote yourself to her in public, try to curb those very expressive eyes of yours, and above all, do *not* sit out with her at dances, because that is the very most imprudent thing any young man or woman can do. You may call at a lady's house fifty times without compromising her as much as by sitting out three dances running with her at a ball. Why not devote yourself in public to her cousin? I suppose there is no fear of your entangling her affections?"

"Not the slightest," returned Dallas. "I shrewdly suspect they are engaged already."

"I wish," said Mrs. Trevanion, rather wistfully, "that you would engage your own somewhere else."

"My dearest friend," exclaimed Dallas warmly, "if you think for one instant that I have the very faintest, slightest idea of——"

"No, no, I don't," she interrupted.

"And besides," proceeded Dallas, "you don't know her if you think——"

"Yes, yes, I do; I have perfect confidence in you both, but——"

However, Mrs. Trevanion concluded not to finish her sentence.

Dallas took her advice, as he generally did, and endeavoured to comport himself in as nearly as possible the same manner to each of the three ladies in Grosvenor Street, and when in public with rather more devotion to Madge and rather less to June, so that the world very soon began to say that it was really a shame for him to pay so much attention to Miss Ellesmere if he did not mean anything, and of course he did not. He never did. See how badly he had behaved to poor Lady Jane Wyldrose.

Very rarely in his life had Dallas practised such self-control as he was doing now. To make love to a woman who attracted him had always been to him a matter of course, but for once he felt the conditions were exceptional and to be treated exceptionally. June, herself, was a very different woman from those with whom he had been in the habit of flirting; she was just as charming—more charming, because he never thought of her but with the most perfect respect. So many women compel men who

would fain do otherwise, to think lightly and contemptuously of them! What man, if he really likes a woman, does not desire to have a good opinion of her and is disappointed and *désillusionné* when he has to pronounce with a shrug that she is "just like the rest."

June was not "just like the rest," and did not become like them, although she mixed with a certain number of women in what is considered a fast set. But fast women are very much like fast men in one respect, and can suit themselves to their company. If a woman is lady-like and refined, and does not talk coarsely, she is not likely to have her feelings wantonly shocked by her own sex—a woman will rather be anxious to make the best of herself before another who is modest and respects herself. And as June was not prone to believe any ill of her acquaintances, and always championed members of her own sex, she was popular enough with them. She and Lady Dangerfield were still friendly, although the intimacy which had at one time promised to spring up had subsided. The fact was that Lady Dangerfield had regarded June as a possible weapon to avenge her upon Lady Jane whom she hated with a deadly hatred for having taken Dallas away from her; but, now that the pair were separated by other circum-

stances, Lady Nevil was no longer in a position to be her tool, and dropped into a mere ordinary acquaintance. She was outwardly civil to Mr. Broke when she met him, but never lost an opportunity of saying something malicious or spiteful about him. She cautioned people against him, and told everyone that he talked. It was such a pity—he was really such a nice boy otherwise, but of course a man who talked was fatal. And she induced one or two of her young admirers, who had perhaps reasons of their own for wishing to detract from him, to spread the report.

For all that, Dallas's popularity remained unimpaired, and no one who knew him believed these libels for an instant.

"If he talked," some people laughed and said, "it might have been the worse for her ladyship."

She was only trying to take the bull by the horns when there was no necessity for it.

The season advanced, and rumours began to fly about of an expedition to Egypt in which the Guards were to take part. At first the idea was ridiculed, but gradually it came to be entertained more seriously, and then to be recognised as a fact. Dallas's battalion was for service, and as soon as this was known to the ladies in Grosvenor Street, it had a most damping effect upon their spirits. Madge, it

is true, affected to share the enthusiasm of Dallas, and talked gaily of the distinctions he would earn; the possibility of medals and Victoria crosses. Mrs. Ellesmere was seriously depressed at the thought of the hardship and danger her favourite nephew might incur, and as for June, each time she realised it, a knot rose in her throat and a mist came before her eyes, and she felt as if life had suddenly become blank. She would look furtively at him as he was laughing and talking in the gayest of spirits, and then her vivid imagination would see him lying dead, with livid, upturned face on a battlefield, or worn and wasted by fever in some wretched hospital.

When people talked before her of the climate, the fierce heat, the intolerable plague of flies, the deadly disease lurking in the putrid water, and all the ill-suggestions which those who had no dear ones going out poured into the ears of the relatives and friends of those who had, a deadly sickness crept over her—unbidden tears would rush to her eyes; she began to realise for the first time that Dallas was of some importance in her life, and that his absence and death would mightily change the face of the world to her. Dallas dead! Whenever she thought of him, it was always with the conviction that he would not return from the expedition to which he looked so gaily forward.

Late one July afternoon June and Mrs. Ellesmere left the carriage at the top of the Row and took chairs under the trees. Dallas was to join them there. Madge was spending the afternoon with a friend. Mr. Carslake passed; then stopped; turned, and asked permission to sit down by Lady Nevil. Presently a friend of Mrs. Ellesmere joined her, and the first pair were left to each other. Naturally enough the conversation turned on the coming campaign, and June, who was always trying to get comfort on the subject, asked Mr. Carslake his opinion of the chances of fighting. She was accustomed to hear the most conflicting accounts; it was to be a walk over—a mere military promenade—there would be no fighting—the Egyptians would run like hares.

The pessimists took a very different view. The Egyptians were fine fellows—they would be fighting for their country. Arabi's influence was unbounded—there were thousands of Bedouins to back him up. Our troops would be harassed by guerilla warfare—would be slain in ambush—would die of fever and pestilence. Those whom disease spared would be mown down by sunstroke. The little British army of picked troops would melt away like wax in sunshine—few would bring their disgraced arms back—England would be humbled in the

dust—it was the beginning of the end. The country was doomed, and we had to thank Childers and Cardwell for it. As for Sir Garnet, he would be all very well for a small affair, a brush with savages, but he was not up to this work. Roberts was the man.

June used to listen until a feeling of despair overcame her. She had an immense sense of patriotism—the thought of evil befalling her country was terrible to her—but oh! there was one thought which made national calamity and disaster doubly fearful. She did not realize to herself what she felt about Dallas or towards him—only that it was an awful thing that he, so bright, so young, should be food for powder; that his valuable life was to be risked in what seemed to her an unworthy and insufficient cause. What madness to send the Guards! it hardly occurred to her that the lives of men in other regiments could be as dear to their friends as those of the *corps d'élite*. If anything happened to the Guards, it would be a national calamity! But, every day, regiments go abroad on service and have to face bad climates and possible death, and it is only looked upon as their business and what they are intended for.

June tried to draw consolation from Mr. Carslake. He did not think it would be a very serious

affair—he was not impressed with a belief in the fighting qualities of the Egyptians—a change of masters would make very little difference to them—they would still be oppressed under any rule. The climate was the worst part of it, though the Bedouins and the Nile might seriously impede our operations.

Then Mr. Carslake, not looking at Lady Nevil, but trying to make his voice indifferent, said,

“I suppose Miss Ellesmere feels Broke’s going very much?”

In a moment his meaning dawned on June, and she saw that a golden opportunity was before her.

“I do not think so,” she answered. “Not nearly so much as my aunt—and I. She only thinks of the brilliant side of war, and not of—of the danger.”

And June’s voice faltered and the tears forced their way to her eyes.

“She will feel it more when he is gone, no doubt,” said Mr. Carslake, tracing a pattern in the gravel with his stick.

“I do not know,” replied June. “People never think anything is likely to happen to their friends unless it is a matter of vitally absorbing interest to them.”

“But I thought such was the case?”

“Certainly not,” exclaimed Lady Nevil, with

great animation. "There is nothing of any sort or kind between Madge and Mr. Broke, except the most ordinary friendship."

"Oh!" and Mr. Carslake looked up at her. "I was told that, if not actually engaged, they were next door to it."

June felt that her opportunity had come.

"What do not people say?" she remarked. "Do you believe every report you hear?"

"Only when it is borne out by appearances."

"You are quite mistaken," said Lady Nevil. "Madge has never been in love but once in her life, and then so seriously that I think it will quite prevent her ever caring much for anyone else."

"Really!" and Mr. Carslake looked up with some curiosity.

June bethought her that this was rather a hazardous venture; but a great deal depended upon it, and, besides, retreat was possible, if necessary.

"Madge seems flippant, and the reverse of serious, I know," she pursued, "but really she is capable of strong and deep affection. She liked some one very much last year, but she behaved in rather a foolish manner, and so—I am afraid—she has lost him. And she has never ceased regretting it."

Lady Nevil looked straight in front of her as she spoke, and was not, therefore, aware of the expression of her companion's face. First he looked at her, and then away from her: his nether-lip trembled a little, he was on the point of speaking, but checked himself.

"I do not know," pursued Lady Nevil, "whether he really had any serious thought of her. I can hardly imagine that he had, or he would not have allowed himself to be put off so easily."

"And how was he—put off—if I might venture to ask?"

"By her making a silly and hollow pretence of flirting with Dal—with Mr. Broke. And she has never ceased regretting her folly. Of course," and this time June looked full at him, "this is entirely between ourselves; it is hardly fair for me to be talking so openly to you of my cousin's affairs."

Mr. Carslake, usually so placid, betrayed signs of agitation.

"What you say shall be sacred. But—but—if I might ask you, what sort of man was he whom you—you fancied your cousin liked, and what reason have you for thinking that she—liked him?"

"He was a good deal older than her," answered June, a little smile lurking about the corners of her mouth, "and he was grave and quiet—in every way

a contrast to herself; but she declared that he was perfection, and infinitely to be preferred to gay young butterflies of Mr. Broke's stamp."

"Tell me frankly," said her companion, "are you speaking of me? I should not venture to ask, unless——"

"Yes, I am," replied June, with equal frankness.

"And—and do you really believe she is not indifferent to me?"

"I am quite sure that you are the only man for whom she has ever cared seriously."

To Mr. Carslake's infinite chagrin, Dallas came up at this moment. But June felt that enough had been said, and that Madge's future, at all events, was safe.

CHAPTER XV.

THE house in Grosvenor Street had to be given up at the end of the second week in July, and, indeed, what pretext could Lady Nevil have made for prolonging her stay in London? It was time she returned to her husband and child; these claims forced themselves upon her a thousand times in the day, and she refused angrily to believe in her own heart that she was not delighted at the thought of going back to home ties and affections. Try as she

might to conceal it from herself, the thought of bidding a last farewell to Dallas hung like lead upon her heart. She would have to look in his face and bid him good-bye for the last time, and yet he would still be in London, and she might still see and be with him. In vain she told herself that, if his presence or absence made so much difference to her, it was high time she was removed from the sphere of his influence.

A sort of constraint fell upon both of them during the last days of June's stay in London; by common consent they avoided being alone together. Dallas felt that he could not trust himself; he did not believe June had any feeling for him other than a friendly and sisterly one, and he was afraid that in some rash moment he might be tempted to betray his passion for her, and so disgrace himself for ever in her eyes. June had made him think differently of women—he had an enormous belief in and respect for her; if he were to tell her, as he had told many other women so glibly, that he loved her, he would have felt himself to be committing a sort of profanation. That she was fond of him in a sisterly way he was certain, and he was only too anxious to make her believe that his feeling for her was of the same nature.

“To think,” he said sorrowfully to her the day

before she left London, "to think that you won't be there to see me off and wish me good luck!"

"I should like to say good-bye to you at the last," returned June, with a slight quiver in her voice; "but I would not for worlds go and see you off. I cannot think how women can go to funerals or to see a friend starting for the wars. It is indecent to cry and sob in public, and the only alternative is to make such an agonising effort over yourself that you look and seem indifferent."

"Should you cry if you came to see me off?" he asked, half laughing, yet with a certain tremor in his voice.

"*That I should,*" she answered, her eyes filling with tears.

"I quite agree with you," said Mrs. Trevanion who was present. "Do not expect, dear boy, that I shall go and see you off. I shall bid you good-bye at home, and then retire into an inner chamber to weep."

"By Jove!" said Dallas. "What should I do if I saw you two dear ladies in tears! I should probably cry myself, and that wouldn't do. I'm afraid," looking at June, "there won't be time to run down to the Hall. I shall have such lots of things to do at the last, and we may be off at a moment's notice."

"Why not come up and stay with me the night

before he goes?" suggested Mrs. Trevanion to June, misdoubting the wisdom of her proposal the moment after it left her lips.

"May I? I will!" June answered at once with eagerness.

"That will be something to look forward to then," exclaimed Dallas, his face lighting up. "What an angel you are!" putting his hand affectionately on his friend's shoulder.

Dallas saw June and Madge off by the train next day; he took cordial leave of the latter, and she wished him a gay farewell, and bade him bring her back the scalps of numerous Egyptians, and return covered with glory.

"I shall see *you* again," he said to June, as the train was starting, keeping a long hold of her hand and for once not attempting to prevent his eyes from betraying to her all he felt. As for June, she was deathly pale; her lips were quivering, there was a look almost of agony in her face. The whistle sounded, the train moved off, their eyes were fixed in one long last gaze, and then they were parted and each felt he had gone out of the other's life.

June leaned back in the carriage and closed her eyes. Madge made some gay remark, but her cousin did not answer, and Madge took the hint and left her alone. Her own pleasant thoughts were com-

pany enough for her—the misunderstanding between her and Mr. Carslake was at an end and he had asked her to marry him.

For a day or two after her return to the Hall, June made an immense effort to banish all thought of Dallas from her mind and to occupy herself with her household gods. She covered her boy with caresses; she made much of his father, and he received her advances kindly enough. But was it only in her imagination, or had Tom altered, and had her influence over him diminished? She tried not to let her heart draw contrasts, but Tom's homeliness of manner and appearance, his careless dress, the hundred nameless things that stamped the difference between him and the men with whom she had of late been thrown, most of all Dallas, forced themselves upon her in a most unwelcome manner.

After all, the little cares and attentions of a man who moves in the world may mean nothing, and only indicate that he has been brought up in a set where outward appearance is valued, but they are exceedingly pleasing to all women and very much missed in a man who has not acquired the habit of them. Tom had never before seemed to his wife so blunt of manner, so wanting in social graces; she felt *froissée* a dozen times a day by something he said or did, and then her thoughts, however involun-

tarily, would fly back to Dallas. He was still in London; the life that was so pleasant and harmonious to all her ideas was still going on in the gay city, and she forgot that of late there had been much more bitter than sweet in it. How dull it was here! every now and then she would hide herself away in her own room and burst into an agony of tears, though she never admitted to herself the cause of her being so profoundly unhappy. She longed, almost feverishly, for the time of the Guards' departure—when they were once out of the country, she thought she would be able to take up the thread of her life again and forget that there had ever been anything to interfere with it. But she clung to the idea of the visit she was to pay Mrs. Trevanion. She wrote and reminded that lady of it, that there might be no chance of her forgetting or drawing back from her invitation. She had not yet told Tom of her intention. She fancied there was a coldness and indifference in his manner in speaking of Dallas.

One day, when something was said about his going to Egypt, and June had been expressing anxiety about the climate, Tom said, in a tone that jarred exceedingly upon her,

“Oh, he'll come back all right! No fear of anything happening to *him!*” She flashed out,

"I daresay he will never come back at all," and a smothered sob rose in her throat, and she turned hastily aside to conceal her emotion.

But it was not lost on Tom, and indeed he had many thoughts which would have surprised his wife had she known them. We are so deeply conscious of our own feeling towards other people, and yet we so seldom stop to realise what they are thinking and feeling about us.

For a long time Tom's disappointment in June had been growing and smouldering. He too had discovered that she was not the ideal wife of his former dreams, and then he had had some one to foster his discontent, and to help any ideas which might come into his brain. Agnes never lost an opportunity of planting a sting in his heart. It is difficult to say what advantage she hoped to derive from making him less happy and satisfied with his wife and home, or why she should have wanted to injure June; but, with some natures, the dislike they feel must have its outlet in trying to harm the object of it. Larger natures say, "The world is wide enough for us both—I hate you but I desire nothing more than to avoid you." That was the way that June felt towards Agnes; for, doubtless, the natural antipathy between them was very strong, though but for Tom it might never have come into any particular activity.

During June's absence, Agnes had enjoyed many opportunities of implanting her covert stings. Once when, apparently by accident, she met Tom at the grave of June's mother, she had said, sighing as they walked away,

"Poor darling Auntie Clare! If she had been spared, I fear it would have been a trial to her to think of June caring so much for the world!"

How did she dare, coming from that sacred spot where the devoted mother slept, say one word that reflected on her idolised child! The words rankled in Tom's breast. As he sat alone in his room that night, the recollection of past days came across him. He remembered what he had thought of June years ago—how he had revered her, what heavenly ideas he had entertained of her capacity for wifehood and motherhood. If anyone had hinted that she might become a fashionable woman and leave her own hearth for the hollow, and, to him, utterly incomprehensible joys of society, he would have laughed the speaker to scorn. Of course he forgot to make the reflection that he was living the very life he most liked and enjoyed, and that there is no particular virtue in leading a jog-trot country and domestic life when it is the one thing of all others in which one delights. He loved home and he could not divest himself of the idea that a woman ought

to prize her home and the society of husband and child, not only before anything else, but to the exclusion of everything else.

Tom was, as we know, of anything but a jealous disposition, yet his wife's evident liking for Dallas was displeasing to him. He did not doubt her—he said to himself that she was with his own mother, but then his mother was so devoted to Dallas that he would no doubt be always in their company. Agnes had shot her bolt on that subject too.

“I do not like Mr. Broke at all,” she said, with great frankness. “I am sure he is quite devoid of principle. I wonder women can be so easily taken by such superficial sort of flattery. I have heard things about him which are anything but to his credit. I believe he boasts that every woman he looks at falls in love with him. I wonder such men are tolerated.”

And, though Tom had affected to defend his cousin, Agnes' words rankled all the same. Was it for nothing that a man devoted himself and all he had ungrudgingly to a woman, but the moment another with a good-looking face and a pleasing manner wished to thrust himself into her good graces, he succeeded without the smallest pains. Tom could never forget the marvellous transformation in June from dulness to extreme brightness the moment

Dallas set foot in the house last Easter. The time was drawing on, and June had not yet found courage to tell her husband of her intended visit to London—she felt instinctively that he would not be pleased. And whatever happened she could not, no, she *could not* give up that cherished idea. She must see Dallas once more.

One morning, four days before the announced departure of the Guards, she said to Tom, as he was about to leave the breakfast-room,

“I am going up on Saturday to stay two nights with Mrs. Trevanion.”

“Oh!” he uttered and stopped short. “Have you not had enough of London yet?”

There was something unusual in his voice—it had a ring of distinct displeasure and dissatisfaction.

An uneasy sensation crept to June’s heart. But something compelled her to say, though with extreme effort,

“I promised to go up the last day and say good-bye to Dallas.”

“Oh!” repeated Tom, and his voice was still more ominously displeased.

June looked out of the window—she had a dreadful intuition that he was going to exercise his authority by forbidding her to go. And for the

first time she became aware how her whole heart was wrapped up in that visit to London.

Her intuition was right. For a moment it flashed across Tom that he would not allow her to go; the veto was on his lip, when a bitter, angry thought swelled in his heart and rolled like a wave over the other. "If she wants to go, let her!" The colour flushed into his face; he looked at her with angry eyes; and then he saw how pale she was and that she trembled.

"Let her go!" repeated the angry voice in his heart, and he turned and went out and banged the door behind him.

"You ought not to go," said June's conscience, but she strangled it with, "I must, I *must*."

What did she expect from this visit? Not pleasure, certainly. It was but that mad violent longing that a woman who cares for a man has to see him "only once more."

There was no mistake about Tom's displeasure. He scarcely spoke to his wife during the days that preceded her journey to London. He half hoped she would understand that he did not wish her to go, and would give up the idea. But, though June was most acutely conscious of his displeasure, she felt that unless he forbade her in so many words, go she must.

And when the time came she went, and Tom absented himself and did not wish her good-bye. But she said to herself, with an aching heart, it would soon be over now, and there would be no more cause for her husband to be displeased on Dallas's account.

Mrs. Trevanion had more than once regretted the impulse which prompted her to invite Lady Nevil to come and see the last of Dallas. She almost hoped that June might change her mind after she reached home. It would be a pity they should meet again, more especially under the circumstances. When a man is going to danger and to possible death, a woman's heart is always at its softest. Mrs. Trevanion knew that Dallas thought a great deal too much of his cousin's wife for his own peace of mind, and she suspected that June was more attracted to him than was at all desirable. June was not fast or a flirt—it was therefore much more serious for her to entertain a strong liking for a man; it could have no possible result but to make her very unhappy.

Since Lady Nevil was determined to come, Mrs. Trevanion concluded that her only plan was not to leave these two young people a moment together, or to give them a chance of saying any parting words. They would only have a few hours to spend

in each other's company. June did not arrive till late in the afternoon, and Dallas had so much to do on his last day that he would not be able to get to them before dinner.

And now the evening, to which June had been looking feverishly forward, had arrived. She was sitting opposite Dallas, who appeared to be in the highest spirits, and thinking every time she looked at his handsome, cheery face that it was for the last time. Her heart was like lead within her breast—she *knew* she should never see him again. She tried to smile and talk, but when she opened her lips, a choking sensation rose in her throat, and made her feel as if she must burst into tears. There was a wistful look in Dallas' eyes, as though he were asking her if she was really sorry he was going—if she would miss him.

Mrs. Trevanion made superhuman efforts to talk brightly; she would not allow herself to dwell on facts, but insisted on putting the most cheerful face on the expedition, and on making the very best of everything. It was quite likely the whole thing would be over before they got out, she said; but Dallas indignantly protested against the idea of their being made fools of for nothing. What should he bring them back from Egypt?—he hardly knew what the *specialités* of the country were. But Mrs.

Trevanion bade him bring himself back safely, and they would be quite satisfied. His "Sam Brown's" sword-belt had arrived just as he was starting for dinner, so he had brought it with him to try on. And, with the help of his hostess, he proceeded to equip himself in it, whilst June, icy cold, with burning cheeks, sat looking on. Dallas, however, seemed pleasurablely excited. He drew his sword from the scabbard, and, flourishing it in the air, wondered laughingly how many Egyptians he should slay with it. Then June shut her eyes, and a horrid picture came across her imagination. She saw him, still grasping his sword, but falling, staggering under his death-wound, his now smiling face convulsed with agony. Oh, it was nothing short of murder to send out a boy like that! And in what a cause! Overwhelmed with agony, a great sob rose in her throat—a sob that would not be stifled; and then, struck with sudden horror at having thus betrayed herself, she rose and fled from the room.

Dallas stopped short, as if paralysed; the colour left his cheeks, and he stood staring at Mrs. Trevanion, who affected not to notice what had happened, and went on arranging the belt.

But Dallas put one hand on her arm, and said, in a voice stammering with emotion,

"Do you think she *really* cares about my going?"

"Do we not all care?" returned Mrs. Trevanion evasively.

"Yes, but—oh, my God! I wish I had known before!" uttered Dallas, leaning against the chimney-piece, and putting one hand over his eyes.

"Why do you wish you had known before?" said Mrs. Trevanion reproachfully. "Would you like to go away nursing a dishonourable passion in your heart? Do you think it would be any comfort to you, supposing," and her voice faltered—"supposing you had to look death in the face, to remember that you had brought unhappiness and doubt into the home of an honest man—a man whose peace of mind you have every right to respect? And, besides, you are wrong in attaching any importance to Lady Nevil's agitation. She is very sensitive; she has seen a great deal of you lately; even if she had only the most cousinly liking for you, she might well feel upset to-night. Do you suppose," the tears standing in her eyes, "that *I* do not feel bad about your going?"

"God bless you, my dear, I know you do. But—but," opening his blue eyes rather widely at her, "you—you don't think I *shan't* come back?"

"No, no," cried his friend. "I am quite sure you will. But I should like to think you went out with a free heart and a clear conscience."

Then there was a long pause, broken at last by Dallas.

"Do you think," he uttered very wistfully, with an imploring glance, "that I might see her for one moment alone before I go, just to wish her good-bye?"

"No, no, no!" answered Mrs. Trevanion with the utmost resolution. "Not for anything in the world; not for both your sakes. You know there is nothing I would not do for you. But not that."

And so, when the time for parting came, Dallas could only say with his eyes, and with that long pressure of the hand, what he felt and thought, and June tried to smile bravely as she bade him the last God speed.

Better so. Whatever happened, neither would have remorse in his heart to make regret more poignant.

When the wheels had rolled away, the two ladies sat down and wept grievously. And theirs were not the only hearts that ached that night.

CHAPTER XVI.

TOM received his wife with extreme coldness on her return. He scarcely spoke during dinner, and, when it was over, went away to his own room. He

did not mention Dallas's name, or make any inquiry about his departure. June was perfectly conscious of these signs of displeasure, but a sort of apathy had stolen over her—it seemed as if nothing mattered very much. In a few days, perhaps, she would feel differently, and then she would set to work to propitiate her husband.

In reality Tom felt himself deeply aggrieved. It took a long time to get an idea into his head, but, once it was there, a still longer time was needed to dislodge it. Why should June have wanted to go to London to bid Dallas good-bye again unless she took a much greater interest in him than she had any right to? As for him, of course he had been at his infernal tricks again; and Tom ground his teeth. Oh, how mistaken, *how* mistaken he had been in June!

Well, he must put up with it now, he supposed—anyhow the boy was left to him, and they two would be all in all to each other, please God! There would be no one to come between them—for the next twenty years or so, at all events.

Day followed day, and still that apathy was in June's veins. She who was wont to be so active, sat listless and idle and took scant interest in anything.

She spent most of her time sitting under a tree

by the lake with a book in her hand or by her side, staring at the water and the lilies, riding in the sunshine, but not seeing anything, occupied only with her thoughts. These ran on shipwreck, fire on board ship, dynamite explosions arranged by Fenians. Something was sure to happen, and she made a list of all sorts of possible horrors and accidents. She would have liked to talk on the subject even to Tom, but, if she so much as referred to the war, he only replied in monosyllables, and changed the conversation at once. Madge had gone on a visit to Mr. Carslake's sister, and June missed her sorely.

At last the papers recorded the arrival of the Guards at Alexandria, and, after that, June looked every day eagerly for news. She was not, as a rule, given to reading the papers, but now, the moment they came, she seized upon them eagerly. This also Tom remarked with displeasure.

Her husband's altered demeanour was by no means lost on June—she began to feel that their estrangement was a serious thing. One morning when he had answered some remark of hers very shortly, she betook herself to her favourite tree, and instead of thinking about Arabi, entrenchments, false prophets, bloodshed, sun-stroke, putrid water, ophthalmia, and sand-flies, the usual cheerful subjects of her meditation, she began to reflect what a serious

matter this growing coldness of Tom's was becoming. She leaned her head back against the tree and closed her eyes.

What a mirage life was! What a mirage marriage was! How disappointing everything was! And yet she had begun life under the happiest auspices! Who could have believed that in a few years such a devoted husband as Tom would grow cold and indifferent! It was not as though he were a man of fashion constantly thrown in the way of beautiful and fascinating women, and tempted thereby to wandering affections; she had no rival in his heart except her child; for, even though Agnes had some baleful influence over him, June did not believe that she possessed his heart. She twisted her fingers painfully together. She, who was still so young, who felt the need of loving and being loved more than ever, to be left with an unsatisfied heart; to have to say farewell to romance in the middle of the first chapter—to have to content herself with the dry husks of ordinary, commonplace life. How could she live without love? she said passionately, and fell to bitter, bitter weeping. She could not.

That evening, the first time for many a long day, she went over to her husband and, sitting down on his knee, passed her arms round his neck as in olden days. But he made no response of any sort

—he simply permitted her to sit there, evincing neither pleasure, distaste, nor emotion of any sort.

Then June's proud spirit rebelled against his indifference, and, with a hasty gesture, she left him and fled away to her own room full of anger and misery. Why had she ever been born to be thus wretched! How dared Tom have pretended to love her if he meant to treat her in this shameful, cruel way! After this, stung to the quick, she outdid Tom in the coldness and indifference of her manner. She no longer attempted to conceal from him her eagerness to see the daily papers, but pored over them under his very nose, rather exulting in the fact that she could vex and make him suffer though he no longer loved her.

Agnes, who came occasionally to the Hall, had every opportunity of seeing the estrangement between husband and wife—indeed, June took special occasion to be captious and frigid to Tom in the presence of that sainted creature.

When Madge returned from her visit, she experienced a sense of consternation at seeing the state of affairs.

“Juny darling,” she exclaimed, “what on earth is the matter with you and Tom? This sort of thing will never do. You are more like two strange cats than the two devoted people you used to be.”

"Oh," returned June bitterly, "that is the way with married people. You and your Mr. Carslake will be just the same in a few years' time."

"Never!" cried Madge, with immense emphasis.

"He will get tired of you," said June. "I don't believe men have any affection. At all events, it does not last."

"Juny!" uttered Madge wistfully, "do you know, I don't think it can be all Tom's fault? I think you must have done something to change him."

"What have I done?" flashed out June.

"You will be angry, I'm afraid, if I tell you what I think," said Madge, slightly embarrassed.

June looked at her expectantly.

"I think," faltered Madge, "I know it is absurd, but I do think Tom is jealous of Dallas."

Then Lady Nevil fulfilled her cousin's prediction by evincing great anger at such an utterly ridiculous and unwarrantable assertion, and Madge was compelled to eat her words and express the sincerest contrition for having suggested anything so impossibly and wickedly absurd. Madge was so extremely happy herself about this time that she had little or no leisure in which to occupy herself with her cousin's concerns. Mr. Carslake was at the Rectory, and was to spend a week at the Hall later. Madge still gave herself coquettish and capricious airs to

her lover, but was careful to abstain from hurting his feelings seriously, as she would not have lost him again for the world. And he was most tolerant of her whims as long as she was able to feel sure that she really cared for him. The marriage was fixed for the middle of September. Sir Thomas and Lady Nevil were to go to their place in the north the second week in October. There had been no visitors at the Hall this summer. June had felt scant inclination to play the part of hostess, and Tom was never very keen about having guests in the house. Mrs. Ellesmere was at Homburg, and had been there ever since they gave up the house in Grosvenor Street. Mrs. Trevanion was the only person who had been bidden. She, however, had other engagements, but promised to come for Madge's wedding and to stay a fortnight after it. To this visit June looked forward amazingly.

Meantime things went on much in the same way. Agnes, indeed, took advantage of June's apparent indifference, to come more frequently to the Hall, and, in one way or another, managed to see a good deal of Tom, and to manifest a great deal of sympathy for him. He did not actually complain of his wife, but it was easy to see he was a disappointed man, and Agnes was able to say a great many words in season.

Madge was far too much occupied with her own affairs to continue her system of espionage over her sister, and June had grown not to care—only to feel a sort of contemptuous indifference. “If it amuses them to be together and to abuse me—let them! What does it matter!”

Her soul was harassed by what she read in the papers—the hardships the troops were enduring, the privations, the heat. Her heart sickened when she read of those terrible purposeless marches in the mid-day sun. Instead of being anxious for the Guards to have opportunities of displaying their heroism, she was thankful when they arrived too late. Honour and glory were vain words in her ears; they were all very well when the danger was over; but all she prayed for then was their safety. What woman is heroine enough to covet glory for the man she loves at the risk of his life!

Mrs. Trevanion sent her some of Dallas's letters to read. They were written in the highest spirits, rather making fun of their hardships, and breathing but one fervent desire—to get on—to be up with the enemy. The Household Cavalry were doing gloriously, but it was cruelly hard for the Guards to be stuck where they were without a chance of getting at the throats of the foe. Then came two or three inquiries for Lady Nevil—a hope that she

thought of him once now and then, and a wish that she might be induced to write him a line. Letters were so welcome, though they came in a most irregular manner, and newspapers not at all.

Thereupon June took pen and paper, with the intention of writing him a long letter. But she soon came to a full stop. What was there of interest to tell him? She had not seen anyone he knew since she left London—she had not heard one iota of news—no single incident happened to break the monotony of her life. What, then, was she to write about? She had to take refuge in writing about the war and himself. It was a dull, stupid letter, she said to herself, as she read it over, but, such as it was, it must go. She longed to put in a postscript, "Do take care of yourself and come back safe;" but that did not seem a fitting injunction to a young would-be hero.

At last a battle was imminent. There had been terrible girdings in the papers at the long delay; all sorts of disasters were prophesied—the entrenchments were impregnable—thousands of troops were marching to the aid of Arabi—a battle, even if we were successful, must inevitably be attended with fearful loss of life. On the night of the twelfth, June did not close her eyes. All night long she saw the picture she had seen that night when

Dallas was trying on his belt and waving his sword in the air. That had been a presentiment, she felt sure. On the morrow, or the day after, she would take up the paper and read his name amongst the dead, as she had done in fancy a hundred times.

All the morning of the thirteenth she went about looking like a ghost, with pale lips and hollow eyes. At noon Tom brought the news to her. Even he was elated and interested this time. "Glorious news—a tremendous victory—our loss comparatively trifling."

A momentary sense of relief came over June, to be crossed immediately by a misgiving. "A comparatively trifling loss" to a nation may mean hundreds of stricken homes, hundreds of broken women's hearts.

She must ask the question.

"The Guards?" she faltered.

Tom did not know—no particulars had arrived yet—this was only a telegram from the station. But he would ride in to L—— himself at once; for, even if he had been jealous of Dallas, he did not forget in the moment of danger that he was his cousin, and was really anxious to hear of his safety.

When he was gone, June sat with her hands idle in her lap, thinking miserable thoughts. She used to fancy herself patriotic, but now she kept wonder-

ing to herself what she would care for this triumph of British arms if Dallas were lying dead on the battle-field.

The time until Tom returned seemed like eternity. Even then the news was meagre. The brunt of the loss had fallen on the Highland regiments—*it was thought* the Guards had not been actually engaged.

Mrs. Trevanion was to arrive that evening. *She* would be sure to know; and so June tried to possess her soul in patience and to buoy herself up with the thought that now probably the war was over, and that, if Dallas had got so far unscathed, he would not be in much danger for the future. But that dreadful presentiment! She was not superstitious as a rule, but that had taken fast hold of her mind, and nothing but the actual news of his safety could restore her confidence.

Mrs. Trevanion came, armed with the latest intelligence. She had called in Downing Street before going to the station, and had heard the last intelligence from a personal friend. Foot Guards under fire, but in second line. Only Colonels —— and —— wounded amongst the officers.

After this, June took heart of grace, and was more cheerful than she had been for a long time; indeed, at dinner that night, her old spirits seemed

to have returned. Mrs. Trevanion's company was thoroughly congenial to her, and they had a hundred topics in common to talk about. Mrs. Trevanion, being a shrewd lady, very soon perceived that things were much changed at the Hall since she had stayed there. Then she had been agreeably impressed by the happy relations between husband and wife, but now it was impossible not to remark the coldness of their demeanour to each other. It grieved her; she had long ago come to the conclusion that life at its best is not very happy or ardently to be desired, but it always pained her to see people, whom Providence had endowed with blessings, making miseries for themselves. And here were two young people gifted apparently with everything life could give, and who certainly had been devoted to each other, estranged and unhappy for no visible cause. She was exceedingly fond of June, and she liked Tom; she must see whether a friendly hand could not do something to draw these two together again—meantime she pretended to be blind, and to remark nothing, but discoursed cheerfully to both, and made the evening pass pleasantly. On the Saturday following the battle, Madge's wedding was to take place, and this naturally was a theme of great interest and promotive of much conversation.

The day arrived—everything went off with great

éclat. Madge was a smiling bride, and Mr. Carslake, if a little less self-possessed, seemed quite as happy.

"I believe they are admirably suited," said Mrs. Trevanion to June, as the two ladies were drinking tea together in the latter's boudoir on their return from the wedding. "And yet how utterly different they are in disposition, appearance, age—everything. I predict all the same that it will turn out a very happy marriage."

"How can we tell!" uttered her ladyship, with a portentous sigh. "One always thinks a marriage is going to turn out well, and then——"

"And then?" with an inquiring smile.

"Then something goes wrong. The man gets tired of the woman, I suppose."

"*You* should not say that, my dear," said Mrs. Trevanion, thinking it a good opportunity to lead up to the subject that had been on her mind ever since she arrived at the Hall.

"Should I not?" said June. "My husband is desperately tired of me, I am sure."

"That is not very likely," answered Mrs. Trevanion. "But, my dear child, tell me—what is wrong between you and Sir Thomas? The last time I was here you were one of the happiest couples I ever saw."

"What is wrong?" and June laid her head gently

back, and looked reflectively at a distant corner of the room. "I do not know," shaking her head. "Once, no matter what I did, I was always right in Tom's eyes; now it is altered—everything is wrong."

"But that is what I cannot understand," protested Mrs. Trevanion. "You, who (I do not wish to flatter you, my love) are so pretty and so charming, and who, I should imagine, have a much stronger mind than your husband, ought to have unbounded influence over him—ought to turn him round your finger!"

"Yes," said June, slowly, "I ought. But you can see whether I do or not."

"And why do you not?"

"Because I am his wife, I suppose. And because of Agnes."

"Because you are his wife is not a good enough argument, at all events in Sir Thomas's case; he is just the man to be managed by a clever wife. But what has Agnes to do with it?"

"Tom thinks," answered June, "that a woman should never want to stir from her home, and that she should be entirely wrapped up in her husband and children; and Agnes, who hates me and who wanted to marry him, is always encouraging these ideas and making him think that I am a worldly, heartless, good-for-nothing, frivolous creature."

"I think I should soon have that young lady out of the house," observed Mrs. Trevanion drily.

"Ah, that is it," replied June, "I have tried—and failed."

Mrs. Trevanion looked puzzled.

"But, my love," she said gently, after a pause, "a woman's whole life depends on the terms upon which she lives with her husband. And—and you *were* very fond of Sir Thomas?"

"I was devoted to him," cried June, with a quivering lip. "I should be now if he would let me. But how can you go on caring for a man who treats you with indifference and shows you that he disapproves of what you do? And I am devoted to my boy, but Agnes has systematically tried to prove to everyone that I neglect and do not care for him, simply because I like to see something of society, and do not want to be buried alive here all the year round. Tom hates London, and has an absurd prejudice about not allowing the child to go there with me. Why should my life be over at two and twenty? Why should I not enjoy society like other women of my age? Why cannot I love my husband and child, and yet take pleasure in the company of other people? If I were like some women, Tom might complain; if I were fast, if I flirted, if I wanted or allowed other

men to make love to me——” And then June stopped short suddenly.

“Of course, of course,” broke in Mrs. Trevanion to fill up the pause, wondering to herself all the same if June thought more of Dallas than was good for her peace of mind. Then she added, in a very clear, measured voice,

“No woman who has self-respect, or who values the happiness of her future, ever allows herself to think of any man but her husband, unless he is so odious or contemptible that it is impossible for her to have any regard for him.”

“And what are you to do?” cried June, with a despairing gesture, “when he repulses your affection?”

“You must win him back,” replied Mrs. Trevanion emphatically, “even at any cost to your own pride.”

The fortnight fixed for Mrs. Trevanion’s visit slipped rapidly away, but June entreated her so urgently to remain another week, that she consented. She was glad when she had done so, for Lady Nevil seemed extremely unwell and out of sorts, and clung very much to her company.

“I don’t know what I shall do when you are gone,” June repeated over and over again. “I feel as though something were hanging over my head.

I should not be surprised if I were going to have an illness."

The third week of Mrs. Trevanion's visit was drawing to a close. It was a dull, gray afternoon. June was cowering over a fire; she had a fit of shivering, and felt more than usually unwell. For the last few days a listless feeling had crept over her—she had no appetite, and felt ill and depressed. She had refused to have a doctor, but to-day Mrs. Trevanion had insisted, and a servant had been despatched to summon him.

"I wonder," said Mrs. Trevanion, "how Dallas is getting on? I don't think his last letter was quite so cheery as usual. He had looked forward so much to Cairo, but it seems they are all disappointed and disgusted with it, and would rather be in the desert."

"Oh," exclaimed June suddenly, with her eyes fixed on the window. "There is Agnes. I am getting positively to hate the sight of her."

"Leave her to me!" observed Mrs. Trevanion. "I will talk to her."

A minute later, Miss Ellesmere was announced. She came in with a longer face than usual, and in her hand she held an orange envelope.

As June saw it, a deadly chill took possession

of her—she shivered violently—her teeth chattered in her head.

“I have some dreadful news,” said Agnes, fixing her cruel eyes on June’s face. “This telegram came for Mamma from Aunt Violet. She was out and Papa opened it. Mr. Broke died of fever last night in Cairo.”

Mrs. Trevanion uttered a cry, then, starting up, ran to June.

She had turned white as death and was falling back senseless in her chair.

CHAPTER XVII.

LADY NEVIL was carried upstairs to bed and it was more than a month before she was able to be moved from it again. The doctor pronounced that she was sickening for a fever—typhoid, he feared. From the moment when Agnes told the cruel news, she never perfectly recovered consciousness, but was either insensible or delirious. Mrs. Trevanion decided to remain and nurse her. She herself was so terribly affected by the news of Dallas’s death, that she felt it impossible to join the gay country-house party to which she was engaged, and preferred to stay in the house of mourning. And a house of mourning it was in truth.

The day after June was taken ill, little Tom began to sicken and in five days he died. Sir Thomas was like one stunned; but his intense anxiety about his wife made the loss of the child perhaps less agonizing. If only June were spared to him, he felt he could bear that other grief, awful though it was! he realized once again how he loved his wife, and what her death would mean to him. His remorse was grievous to witness—he made no attempt to conceal it from Mrs. Trevanion—indeed, it was the only thing he could talk of. He clung to her, imploring her not to leave them—he seemed to hang on her presence as the only chance of saving his darling.

Her heart bled for him—to be in the midst of this suffering and anguish took in part from the intense grief she felt about Dallas. What a blank his death would make! how she would miss his cheery face, his bright, kind, affectionate ways! People are soon forgotten in the world, but she would not forget him!

All day long she used to spend in June's room, watching over her whilst the excellent trained nurse took her well-earned rest. It was thought desirable that June should not know much of what was going on around her, and frequent sedatives were given to soothe her restlessness. She seemed unconscious

for the most part; sometimes her mind would wander, but it was always to some long-past incident of childhood or girlhood, and she would take Mrs. Trevanion for her dead mother.

To that lady's relief the name of Dallas never crossed her lips. During those dreadful days of her poor little child's illness, death, and burial, June was happily unconscious. She knew nothing of Tom's agonised face, as he came in with hushed steps and haggard eyes from that other chamber where half his hopes lay dead—from the little waxen figure that it would have broken June's heart to see. This anguish at least she was spared.

When the funeral was over, poor Tom used to creep up to the nursery and sit with his face in his hands. Sometimes he would take up one of little Tom's toys, and then, poor fellow, he would burst into a terrible passion of dry sobs. When he came down, he would go on tip-toe into his wife's room and look at her in dumb despair; then, turning to Mrs. Trevanion, would grasp her hand convulsively, muttering, "Oh, for God's sake, save her!"

Seven, fourteen, twenty-one days, and June's condition remained unchanged. Still Mrs. Trevanion stayed on. Poor Tom's only consolation was in her, and she had not the heart to leave him or June either. She dined with him in the evening, but it

was a sad and gloomy meal indeed, and afterwards if she sat for half an hour to try and cheer him up, he would talk to her about his remorse. Oh! please God June should recover, he would be a different husband to her in the future. He had neglected her, yes, he had—he had made too much of the child. That, with a great sob, was why God had taken him. And to think he had made such a fuss about not letting him go to London, when all the time there was more danger here in his home which he had believed to be the healthiest spot in the wide world.

For the discovery had been made that there was something wrong at the Hall, and that the sanitary arrangements were most imperfect.

After the twenty-first day June took a turn for the better. For the first time she looked at Mrs. Trevanion with recognition in her eyes, and put out a wasted waxen hand to her.

“Have I been ill?” she asked, in a languid voice.

“You will soon be well now, dear child,” answered Mrs. Trevanion, in her cheeriest tones.

“Where is Tom?” she asked presently.

“Would you like to see him?”

June made a gesture of assent, and Mrs. Trevanion went to fetch him.

“But,” she said, as he was preparing with

alacrity to obey the summons, "not in these clothes," looking at the mourning garments he was wearing for his lost heir. "And if," her voice faltering—"if she asks for the poor darling, you must try to command yourself, and say that he has gone away to stay."

Tom arrayed himself in an old shooting-suit, and went on tip-toe to his wife's room. What an eager light there was in his honest face as he approached the bed, and once more saw recognition in the eyes of his beloved! She smiled faintly and held out her hand to him, and he took it in his as tenderly as though it might melt away at a touch.

"You are going to get well now, my darling," he whispered, and two big tears forced themselves to his eyes.

"Where is little Tom?" asked June faintly. "I want to see all the family."

Mrs. Trevanion saw the convulsive working of Tom's face, and hastened to interpose.

"He is with his grandmother, darling," she said, thinking sadly of June's dead mother; but June understood, as it was meant she should, that he was with Mrs. Ellesmere.

"Fancy Tom letting him out of his sight!" she murmured, and then sank back tired, and said no more.

That night, as Mrs. Trevanion was sitting by her bedside, thinking she was dozing, June sud-

denly opened her eyes, and, with a fixed look, said,

"Is it true?"

"Is what true, dearest?"

"Dallas!" uttered June, in a low voice.

Mrs. Trevanion hid her face in her hands, and the tears fell thick and fast through her fingers.

"How hard!" said June, and then closed her eyes and relapsed into silence.

The doctors now gave every hope of her recovery. When she was well enough to be moved, she was to be taken to the seaside, and, as Mrs. Trevanion could no longer be spared from home, Mrs. Bryan was to be installed as head nurse.

"Oh," said Tom, in a melancholy voice, as they sat together after dinner on the last evening, "what shall I do without you? I don't believe my poor little girl would ever have pulled through but for you."

"You will be everything to her now," answered Mrs. Trevanion cheerfully. "She will not miss me when she has you."

Tom shook his head mournfully.

"I'm afraid I'm rather like a bull in a china-shop in a sick-room," he said. "I shall do my best, but a man is a poor hand at being cheerful and saying the right thing to an invalid. And, if she were to have another relapse, I should be frightened

out of my wits, and she would see it. And—and who is to tell her about—about the boy?” and poor Tom’s utterance grew thick and choked.

“When she is stronger, you must tell her,” answered Mrs. Trevanion, with tears in her eyes. “And when you talk about your dreadful loss, it will be heart-breaking at first, but it will draw you closer together afterwards. And now,” looking very kindly at his grieved face, “do you feel sufficiently friendly to me to allow me to take a liberty?”

At this Tom jumped up, and, coming round to her, seized her hand and held it fast.

“What in the world might you not say or do?” and he took the chair beside her.

“You know,” said Mrs. Trevanion, after a slight pause, “when our poor darling was so ill and we did not know which way it might turn, I would not allow you to reproach yourself in any way on her account; but, now that she is going to get quite well and strong again, you must be all in all to each other, just as you were when first you married.”

“Yes, yes,” gasped Tom. “God knows how I wish it! But I am afraid she will never feel the same to me again. I have been a brute. I neglected her.”

“No,” said Mrs. Trevanion smiling, “you have

never been a brute, I am quite sure. And I do not mean to let you be unjust to yourself. But I *do* think that, like many of your sex, you have not quite understood your wife; that you have not been so careful of her as you should have been; you have expected her to do just what you thought right, without making due allowance for her inclinations. You know," gently, "if a man marries a very pretty and charming young woman, he ought to show that he appreciates her. Sympathy is the first want of a true woman's nature; if sympathy is denied her from the quarter where she looks for it, where she has a right to expect it, she will begin by being unhappy, and, perhaps, end by getting it elsewhere."

Tom uttered a groan; his friend's words went home sorely to him.

"You see," proceeded Mrs. Trevanion, "the life that is so thoroughly congenial to you does not present the same sources of pleasure and attraction to a young woman of June's type, that is, to a woman who likes cheerful society and to be made much of. Though I quite believe that, if you could have remained her lover and constant companion, she would have been satisfied with her home life. She has never expressed to me anything but devotion to you and bitter regret at having, as she believed, lost your affection and her influence over you."

"It was all my fault," groaned Tom. "What a fool I have been, and now, I suppose, it is too late?"

"No, no," cried Mrs. Trevanion, "it is not at all too late; it is just in time. You have no one now but each other—in your hearts you love each other, I am sure, as much as you ever did."

"God knows, I do," interposed Tom.

"And so does she. If there is ever any estrangement between you again, it will be your fault, I believe."

"But—but," said Tom, and hesitated; then looked at her and away again, and finally came to a full stop.

"But?" she repeated encouragingly.

"I don't know how to say it, it seems a shame, I would not breathe it to anyone but you, and—and, now he's gone, poor chap!"

"Poor boy!" uttered Mrs. Trevanion, the tears rushing to her eyes. "Could anyone help liking and taking pleasure in his company? But if you think——"

"No, no, no," cried Tom eagerly. "I don't think, I won't think."

"You may rest quite sure of one thing," said Mrs. Trevanion, recovering her composure. "As long as you are fond of your wife, and show her that you are so, you need not fear any rival. No woman ever needed affection more than June, and

no woman would appreciate and show that she appreciated it more."

"God knows if I love her!" cried Tom fervently. "Why, wrapped up as I was in the boy, when she was lying between life and death, it seemed to me that I could spare him fifty times over sooner than her."

"Tell her this when the time comes!" said Mrs. Trevanion gently. "All these things will draw you more and more together. And now may I say one word about something else?"

"Say on," uttered Tom eagerly.

Mrs. Trevanion paused a moment; then, looking at him very kindly and speaking in a low but resolute voice, she proceeded.

"No third person ought ever to be allowed to come between a husband and wife. The cause of most of the misunderstanding between you and dear June has been the interference of Miss Ellesmere."

Tom assumed rather a hang-dog expression. "She meant well," he said humbly.

"No," returned Mrs. Trevanion, with extreme vivacity, "she did *not* mean well. She meant to separate you and June as much as possible. I will prove it to you," seeing that Tom, though he dared not speak, was defending Agnes in his mind. "If she had meant well, if she had wanted you both to be happy, she would have tried to make you see your wife's actions in a favourable, not an unfavour-

able light. She would not have been dropping perpetual innuendoes that June was frivolous and worldly, and that she neglected you and your child. Did she ever attempt to blame *you*, or suggest to you that *you* should show more sympathy with and have more consideration for your wife's tastes? Did she ever point out to *you* that your wife was beautiful and young, and calculated to win admiration, and that it was natural to every charming woman to like to be loved and admired? Did she ever say to you that, if you made much of June at home and showed your appreciation of her, it would be more successful in weaning her from society than treating her with coldness and displeasure? Did she ever attempt to show you that you were acting injudiciously and a little unjustly, or did she not rather try to prove to you that everything you did was right, and that it was always June who was in the wrong?"

Mrs. Trevanion's voice had a certain vibration of excitement in it, and she was regarding Tom with very earnest eyes. And though he was, as we know, a little prone to be obstinate, her words carried conviction with them, and he felt instinctively that she was right.

"Any person who genuinely desires to mediate between husband and wife," proceeded Mrs. Trevanion, "if he or she have the least tact, will never

blame one to the other, but will, on the contrary, point out to each in a kindly and unobtrusive way his own little short-comings and the virtues and good qualities of the other."

"Yes, yes," said Tom heartily. "I am sure you are right. But I think, with poor Agnes, it was what you would call want of tact more than anything else. However," seeing the expression of dissent on his friend's face, "it shall never happen again. No one—nothing shall ever come between my wife and me. Please God she gets well, she shall have it all her own way."

Mrs. Trevanion smiled. "I think you will find," she said, "that June is less likely to be spoiled by too much kindness than by the other method. And I am quite sure that a man as good and kind as you are, ought to make any reasonable woman happy, and will do so when left to yourself."

"Oh," cried Tom deprecatingly, "don't say anything about me! I'm a very poor sort of chap, I'm afraid!"

"No, you are not," said Mrs. Trevanion smiling, and putting out her hand to him. "But you are none the worse for being modest. And, when I come to stay with you again, I know I shall find you the happiest couple in the world."

"And it will be thanks to you," cried Tom fervently, still grasping her hand.

"It will be thanks to the natural good qualities of both of you, and to there being no one to interfere," answered Mrs. Trevanion kindly.

It was the first week in January. Sir Thomas and Lady Nevil were staying at their place in the north. Extensive alterations were being made at the Hall, and, indeed, both its master and mistress shrank from the idea of returning to the place where such terrible calamity had befallen them. June had almost recovered her health though not her spirits. Her child's death had been a crushing blow: it seemed to her a sort of divine retribution for having thought too little of him in his lifetime.

Six months ago, anyone might safely have predicted that the boy's death would have fallen with ten times more severity on Tom than on June, but such was not the case. Tom was almost cheerful, whilst his wife was a prey to the deepest grief. Now Tom only had one object in life: to devote himself to June; to heap love, affection, caresses upon her; to prove to her beyond all doubt how thoroughly and entirely she occupied his heart. And June, if she remained sad, thoroughly appreciated his kindness and tenderness, and was always ready to reciprocate it after a gentle and subdued fashion, very different from her gay, coquettish

manner of old. Time would doubtless bring that back, but it would have been strange and unnatural that she should so soon forget.

Her heart had returned to its old allegiance. Tom was again the one man in the world whom she loved, and whose existence was necessary to her. When she thought of her dead young hero, it was with the tenderness of a sister's love, and she could thank God, oh, how fervently! that no word had ever been spoken between them that might tarnish her memory of him or cause her a single pang of self-reproach.

Mr. and Mrs. Carslake were their only guests and thoroughly congenial ones. Madge's brightness and gaiety, tempered by her sympathy for her cousin's distress, made her presence most welcome to June, and Mr. Carslake, who possessed a very kind heart and considerable tact, was excellent company for Tom. He was, moreover, an excellent sportsman, and, with his host, enjoyed the capital sport which the place afforded. Madge was exceedingly happy. Being neither quite so sentimentally inclined nor so exacting as her cousin by disposition, she was in no danger of suffering disappointment or *désillusionnement*, and was perfectly satisfied with the very real if undemonstrative-in-public affection of her lord.

"I am sure," she said, laughing to June, "anyone might think that you and Tom were bride and bridegroom rather than Robert and I. As for Tom, I believe he must have been taking lessons in the art of love-making, he does it so well."

Tom and Madge had made up their differences and were on the old affectionate terms again.

One morning as the four were sitting at breakfast, the letters, unusually late, were brought in. Presently the rest of the company were startled by a whoop in the old style from Madge, as she started up and executed one of the *pas seuls* dear to the days of her youth, but which she had relinquished since she had arrived at the dignity of the marriage state.

"Madge!" remonstrated her husband, pretending to look shocked but inwardly amused.

"This letter," cried Madge, waving it in the air, "contains the most delightful news in the world—news that will fill each of your separate and all your collective hearts with joy when you hear it. I will not take up your time by asking you to try and guess, because you never would. Our *dear* Agnes is about to become a Bishopess. But do not, my loves, be too elated by the grandeur of the connection. He is only a Colonial bishop. Listen to mother's letter.

“It seems that Agnes produced a great impression upon him when he saw her a year ago at the Marstons. He thought her so very sweet (Madge looked over with twinkling eyes at June), and was so struck by her earnest interest in mission-work. So he begged Mrs. Marston to invite them to meet again, and proposed to her the day before yesterday. She is to accompany him to Africa in the spring. It will be a great trial to part from her, especially as we have already lost one of our dear children, but if it is for her happiness, we must not consider ourselves.’

“Fancy Aggie Bishopess of the Cannibal Islands!” cried Madge; “perhaps they will eat her one day. I wonder if a sweet woman tastes better than an ordinary one? I remember quite well meeting the bishop at the Marstons and thinking him one of the most odious and domineering wretches I ever saw. He is very small, with coal-black eyes and beard, and a complexion of a decidedly liverish hue—he looked as though he might have improved it with soap and water if he had cared to, but I don’t think he did care. He had a delightful conviction that ninety-nine out of every hundred souls would go to a naughty place, and he looked as if he had a fiendish temper. So Aggie’s sweetness will have full scope.”

Madge uttered her tirade with such a mixture of drollery and malice that even Tom burst out laughing.

Late in the afternoon, when he was sitting in his wife's boudoir before dinner—he had resumed this old affectionate custom—June said, leaning her head against his shoulder,

“We must give Agnes a very handsome wedding present.” And then, with something akin to her old playful manner, “It will be a thank-offering.”

“We will give her whatever you like, my darling,” answered Tom. “It is just as well perhaps that she is going away, but,” with emphasis, “whether she goes or stays, no one shall ever come between my wife and me again.”

“Do you swear it?” said June, looking earnestly into his eyes.

“I swear it. So help me God!” he answered.

And, to ratify his bond, he took her in his arms and kissed her sweet pale face fervently again and again.

THE END.

October 1883.

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